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FISHING WAYS AND WILES

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THE PATH TO THE RIVER

FISHING WAYS AND WILES

BY

MAJOR H. E. MORRITT

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

LORD HOWARD DE WALDEN

WITH A FRONTISPIECE IN COLOUR AND NINE MONOTONE ILLUSTRATIONS BY THE AUTHOR, AND THREE BY FRANK REYNOLDS, R.I.

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY
1929

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

TO YOU

ROBIN

In the hope and belief that you may extract from the sport of Fishing, and the beauties by which it is surrounded, some of the undiluted happiness which I have derived from it. Also, I hope that, in years to come, the perusal of this, my first and only book, which incidentally you caused me to write, may keep green the memory of those laughing, happy days of companionship at Rokeby and Chirk.

That you may find in sport what I have found,
That you may steal delight from sight and sound
Of running water, singing round your feet;
Forget the worries of the busy street
And live again those care-free happy days,
When I would teach, and you would learn the ways of fish—
That is my wish!

H. E. M.

INTRODUCTION

BY

LORD HOWARD DE WALDEN

IF an author adopt and maintain an apologetic attitude throughout a work, how abject should be the pose of one of his pupils who has been lured into writing a preface thereto?

For the little I know of fishing I have learnt from the author, and it would be only natural in me to accept his views and endorse his judgments. But how can I agree with opinions so tentatively expressed? If he admit to knowing so little, obviously I know nothing at all and am best employed in concealing my ignorance by a suitable silence.

Nevertheless, I can assure the reader that the author's modesty though graceful and becoming is hardly justified. I can certify that he does catch a sufficiency of fish: often in circumstances which I regard as scarcely decent.

I can recall one instance when, after a long and fruitless afternoon's fishing upstream with a worm, I was overtaken by him with a respectable basket of fish. I made a few reasonable comments upon the river, the weather, natural selection as applied

to the self-detaching worm and kindred subjects. He replied soothingly that there was a likely run just opposite me. I stated somewhat sourly that I had noticed it and had fished it conscientiously about five times. He maintained that in the natural order of things there must be a fish and a decent fish in that spot. I demanded demonstration. He fished it twice whilst I made sarcastic remarks. The third time he extracted an unusually good fish for that water, and I retired muttering. This was but one occasion amongst many during the twenty years or so that we have fished in company, and I am still waiting grimly for the day when, conditions being equal, I shall kill more fish than he does.

I have followed the author's methods even to the extent of adopting the adorable combination of art and sport which he recommends, having indeed certain leanings to it myself. For although it is not really advisable to write a chapter on the joys of not catching fish for fear of offence, there are undoubtedly times, as far as I am concerned, when the mere knowledge of their presence, although not apparent, lends just a zest to the common beauty of their surroundings. And the desire to translate this satisfaction becomes urgent even though the power be wanting. Therefore I am convinced that every fisherman is in part an artist. To be absorbed in one's object to such

an extent that one becomes almost merged and identified with it, is the ideal state of mind which precedes the form of expression known as art. And although one may not attain the consummation it is something to have drawn near to it.

So remarkable is this attraction to running water that I am almost tempted to propound a scientific theory that it is a form of atavism : that as our remote ancestors emerged from the sea (as I am assured by scientific authorities they did), they ran up the rivers like salmon : that by the riverside we are in touch with the great adventure of life and standing by its path. If anyone care to adopt this theory I make him a present of it. It might also be attacked from an ethnological point of view, bearing in mind the legendary aversion of the People of the Hills to salt and running water.

I have one little fault yet to find with the author. I have spoken of his technique as a fisherman : of his technique as an illustrator the reader or observer must judge. I regret his comparative failure as a story-teller (I was about to use a more concise word, but let it stand). I regret that the last chapter of his book is not more extensive and pitched a little higher in tone. At the bottom of our hearts—no, even at the top of them—we all love stories, but a fiendish jealousy

seems to possess those who being neither fishermen nor hunters of game have no great store of remarkable happenings. They have therefore branded these two classes who supply the world with its noblest yarns as untruthful. And so far has this vile and unnatural process spread that all fishermen and hunters know that there is now only one thing to be done with an unusual and absurd occasion—tell it as a lie, as Kipling's hero dealt in 'A Matter of Fact' with the sea serpent.

I have still hopes that I may be able to persuade the author to fish the Amboni, where the necessary equipment is an 8-foot rod and a .450 express in addition to the sketching outfit. Then he might write an agreeable or even entrancing sequel to this work, containing nothing of interest either to beginners or experts (both undesirable classes), but dealing with alleged occurrences. And even if he choose to tell the tale of the forty pounder and the broken top joint (a holy occasion on which I was present), or relate the words that passed when Ahab smote Ananias instead of the salmon on the head, or describe the reasons that made Ananias turn out to gaff in his funeral clothes, I will most willingly act as chorus, which is a duty more agreeable than speaking the prologue.

PREFACE

ABOUT fifteen years ago, when on a fishing trip in Norway, the friend with whom I shared the fishing asked me why I did not write a book on the subject. The reasons for not doing so at that time were many and obvious, and, as far as I can remember, I enumerated all of them. I was learning to fish, although I had had about twenty-five years' experience; I was a learner not a teacher, for I knew even less about the subject than I do now, when I am only just beginning to realize how little I know.

There was, however, at least one subject on which I knew considerably less, and that subject was the construction and writing of books. It had never entered my head that it was possible for me to write a book about anything. Many boys try to write when at school; I have known friends at Eton who were even then budding novelists, but as far as I was concerned I had never made any attempt at all to express myself in print. Even if I had known all there was to be known about fishing, I felt myself to be absolutely inarticulate on the subject.

All this and much more to the same effect I

told my friend, and, having told him, thought no more about it.

From time to time others have asked me why I did not write this book, and always I have answered that, although I loved fishing in all its branches, and had practised it since infancy, the last thing I wished to do was to write about it.

So very many books have been and will be written on the subject of fishing by those who have given the results of a life's study to the sport—the books of eminent men in sporting and other fields, books of theory, books of practice and practical fishing, books which were so beautifully written that they must appeal even to those who had never fished at all and never wanted to fish; brilliant books and thoroughly bad books—that apart from any other consideration it seemed presumptuous in one who pretended to no exceptional skill in the practice of the sport, and was completely ignorant in the method of expressing himself, to attempt to add yet another book to the long list of triumphs and failures.

I was told that I had had years of experience which might be of assistance to others, and my answer was that any result of that experience had been handed on to all my friends—at any rate, to those who wanted it—and that my boy was a living example of all I had to teach: he, in fact, was my book! It was not until about a year ago

that he himself, backed up by a friend of ours —his house-master at Eton—brought so much pressure to bear that, in the early hours of the morning, they extracted from me a promise that one day I would try to do this thing.

There is one other consideration which I must confess carried some weight, and that was that I might make an attempt to illustrate my own book. Although I only started to paint at the age of thirty-nine, it has of recent years been the greatest joy to me to try to paint the rivers which I have fished and loved since I was six years old. The hundredth part of what I see and feel and know and love in those rivers could never be expressed on any canvas by any artist, but I shall continue to derive pleasure, and consequent disappointment, in the effort as long as I live, and if one of the sketches which illustrate this book brings back more or less vividly to the mind of one of my readers the feeling and memory of some happy fishing day, I shall consider that they have not completely failed.

The responsibility for this effort rests, therefore, with my friends, and more especially with him to whom this book is dedicated; if I am arrested in consequence, I can only hope that they will have the decency to bail me out.

H. E. M.

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* *From Drawings by Frank Reynolds, R.I.*

FISHING WAYS AND WILES

CHAPTER I

FISHING AS A WHOLE

The Point of View—The Dry Fly Purist—The Fly Fisherman—The General Practitioner—No Rival Sport—Variety of Surroundings—Experiences—Sketching in Waders—Why Water Colours.

IT is with feelings of considerable trepidation that I commence to write this, my first chapter, and the fact that Fishing is the subject of it in no way lessens that feeling. It has been done so often, and so well done, that although I have been a most ardent devotee of the sport for forty years, I can hardly hope to add anything of importance to what has already been said.

The only fact in which I find any consolation is the indisputable fact that we none of us know anything.

Fishing, in common with nearly everything else, depends on the point of view of the fisherman—and fishermen have so many points of view in all of which I have complete sympathy. There is the point of view of the Dry Fly Purist, who

plays a highly skilful and attractive game under very definite rules. He is out to represent the floating fly, and the floating fly alone.

The joy and pleasure this man derives from the sport is the pleasure of the specialist. Often he knows and studies the habits of the fish when the latter is engaged in pursuits other than the pursuit of the floating fly, but from a fishing point of view they have no interest for him. His pleasures lie chiefly in the peaceful, lovely meadows of the chalk streams, and very lovely they are.

He is no mean entomologist, and the knowledge of insects and their habits, apart from being of immense value to him in the pursuance of his sport, is in itself a delightful and pleasure-giving study.

I should imagine that the day that will live in his memory for all time is the day on which he outwitted an 'old stager', or a brace of them, which had not only defeated him often, but had also been too much for all his friends. If the conditions of the taking of that fish were exceptionally difficult, and asked for skill, ingenuity, patience, and resource to a high degree, then surely it is a worthy memory. That seems to me to be the dry fly purist's point of view, and a very good point of view too. He is, as I said, a specialist, and in common with all other specialists

MY COMPANIONS IN CRIME

is sometimes a little prone to think that his is the only point of view.

The musketry specialist in the Great War was a little apt to forget that anything except a rifle could conceivably be of any use ; but, after all, there were several other arms which had a good deal to do with the result.

Then there is the point of view of the Fly Fisherman, wet or dry. He must always fish with a fly, and confines himself to the study and imitation of the fly, or the nymph, as the case may be. He, too, it seems to me, is a specialist in a lesser degree. He has taken on two very difficult and scientific branches of the sport. His object is to kill fish on any water with a fly, floating or sunken, according to the conditions of the day and the activities of the fish.

If there is a definite hatch of fly, and trout are feeding on the surface, it will be the dry fly ; if, on the other hand, there is no hatch, or a hatch which is being ignored, and trout are bulging, he will fish the wet fly or nymph, and thereby most probably save himself a blank day.

He, too, plays a game under definite rules, and he will admit of no fishing which is not with a fly. If he succeeds in making the fish believe that the imitation of the insect which he so skilfully presents is the real thing, he wins.

A friend of mine, who recently came to fish

with me, admitted that he played a game with the fish, and that if he deceived the fish sufficiently to hook him and get him into the net, he had won and the fish had lost—he then returned the trout to his native element. He is a fine fisherman and a good sportsman, and extracts from fishing probably as much genuine enjoyment as any man living.

Finally, there is the point of view of the general practitioner of the sport, who may not have the consummate skill of the specialists in their particular branches, but who would most probably give as good an account of himself and his powers on a strange stream, under strange conditions, as either of the other two.

He goes out to catch fish in the way that seems best to him at the moment, always provided that he makes the fish come to him. He attempts to offer the fish its normal diet of the moment, and if he succeeds in presenting that diet in a manner sufficiently natural to deceive the fish, he feels that he has won.

Whether the diet consists of a floating fly, a nymph, a creeper, worm, or natural minnow, is not a matter of very great importance, although he would probably prefer to fish with one of the first two, if by so doing he was at all likely to succeed.

If by fishing the natural minnow, for instance,

he kills trout, and large trout, they are almost invariably cannibals and the river is well rid of them.

If he is a good general practitioner, his fishing equipment — by which I mean his knowledge and experience of the various means of catching trout—must be more extensive than that of the specialists ; or, shall I say, more varied. His trout lore must be greater, and he must have a fuller insight into the habits of trout in different rivers. He goes out to catch trout, to pit his ingenuity and intelligence against the cunning wariness, shy instinct, or what you will, of the trout. He must deceive the trout and make the trout come to him. Just what form his deception takes does not really matter to him.

Probably the sort of day which he will recall, with as much pleasure as any other, would be the day on which he was challenged to catch trout on some stream which he had never seen, under conditions which were new to him, and having searched for a surface-feeding fish and found none, having tried his sunken fly in all the most likely places without result, he has come to the conclusion that either the river contains no fish at all, or that their diet at the moment, and probably their usual diet, consists of something else.

Perhaps he has brooded over the matter at lunch, and, having looked sadly into an empty basket, has departed to search the shallows and

backwaters for minnows. He has found them at last, and the necessary tackle having been got together and adjusted late in the afternoon, he has defeated four or five big fish, which in all probability could never have been taken in any other way. Only once or twice in a year would those fish have taken a fly.

I may as well confess that my own point of view is that of the general practitioner, and my real sympathies are with him. After all, it is the same old argument, whether you apply it to fishing, athletics, medicine, soldiering, the legal, or any other profession, or to life in general, whether it is better to do one thing superlatively well or a great many things indifferently.

For myself, I am on the side of the versatile person, because personally I have attempted to do a great many things, have succeeded in doing them indifferently, and have derived a good deal of genuine pleasure from the efforts I have made. Yes, I am on the side of the general practitioner in fishing, but this fact has in no way blinded me to the specialist's point of view.

Whichever way one looks at the subject, the fact remains that, to the fisherman—the good fisherman—there is really no other, at least no rival, sport. I have tried most sports and most games with varying success, but if for some reason or other I was doomed to confine myself to *one*

of these, the choice would not give me a moment's hesitation. My guns, my golf clubs, billiard cues, and so on, would go, and although I should be sorry to lose them, it would not be a calamity.

But my fishing-rods, my days by the river, the testing of my theories—if those were taken from me, it would indeed be calamitous.

I have often wondered wherein lies this absorbing attraction? Admittedly, the really keen fisherman is not a normal human being; but even so, it would be interesting to know just how and why the pursuit, or rather the luring of fish, had enslaved him. It may be that the attractions of the sport are so varied in their appeal, that apart from the actual luring of the fish there are so many other things to satisfy the senses.

Almost invariably the surroundings in which the fisherman finds himself are in their different ways wholly beautiful. Each river and lake possesses its own personality, and is always lovely, whether it be the majestic heavy splendour of the Norwegian salmon river, the turbulent truculence of the Scotch mountain trout stream, or the warm, slumbrous peace of the Test valley.

They are all so satisfyingly beautiful in their own way, and the fish which inhabit them seem to possess the characteristics of their own surroundings, of their own river. Fishing, more I think than any other sport, leads its disciples into

the heart and beauty of nature ; even the animals and birds take little or no notice of the fisherman, more especially if he is wading almost waist deep in the stream.

Salmon fishing, one summer's evening, in Yorkshire, I noticed a sudden disturbance in the water just where my fly was alighting. At first I thought it was a fish rising, then suddenly, a little farther up, appeared the round head of an otter, followed by three others, and for twenty minutes I stood stock still watching the old mother otter teaching three cubs to fish.

I caught no salmon, but my evening was a complete success, for they came quite close to me and were so intent on their sport that they failed to notice the presence of a rival sportsman.

I have seen in Wales a kingfisher teaching her brood to dive. At first the infants refused to try, until one by one she pushed them off the branch on which they were sitting, after which they became proud and enthusiastic !

Once in the dusk, on a Welsh estuary, I saw an otter kill a salmon. That was the most amazing experience. I had always wondered how on earth they ever managed to do it, but on this occasion the otter rushed the fish on to a shelving shingle bank, and there fastened on its prey.

I was standing on a high clay bank, behind tall rushes, and the whole fight took place at my feet

two or three yards away. The noise was extraordinary—the lashing and splashing in the shallow water and the sound of the otter snuffling like a bulldog. It was the most exciting minute or two, and I shall never forget it.

Every fisherman has similar experiences, and they each add something to the attraction of the sport. He feels that he has been privileged to see something of the everyday life of the birds and animals around him that, had he not been a fisherman, he would never have seen or known.

The call of fishing depends on so many things that it is almost impossible to enumerate them; but one of the chief attractions of the sport seems, to me, to be that it is necessary for the fisherman to make the fish come to him.

This is not the case with any other sport of which I have any knowledge. Shooting, stalking, foxhunting, etc., do not have this quality of attraction. Other attractions they may have which call for endurance, skill, and daring, but even in fishing these qualities are by no means at a discount.

I know few more exhausting pursuits than a long day's salmon fishing, in a high wind, combined with deep and treacherous wading; the skill required is at least equal to that which is necessary to the expert stalker or game shot, and the daring, though of rather a different sort, is

not wholly absent. To stand on a greasy one-foot-broad plank, over a torrent, and wield a heavy salmon rod in order to cast a long line, with the ever-present knowledge that the slightest slip spells disaster, or even death, requires a considerable amount of nerve, while rough wading in heavy water, with unknown under-currents and shifting shingle, is sometimes an awe-inspiring experience.

Nearly every fisherman has in him something of the artist, and I know many artists who are keen fishermen. The two things seem to go hand in hand, so much so that I know of few occupations quite so fascinating as 'sketching in waders'. Sometimes, of course, success attends neither branch of artistry: no fish are caught and the sketch is so bad that it is wiped on the mat before entering the house.

Sometimes the sketch is so thrilling that the waders never get wet and the basket is empty; sometimes the fish rise so well that the sketch never gets started at all; but there are days on which both branches are tolerably successful.

Such a day I remember very well, and always with the greatest pleasure. I went out one afternoon to 'sketch in waders' with a friend, a famous *Punch* artist, a humorist, and in my opinion one of the greatest humorous black-and-white artists of the period. He did not fish, but

contented himself with doing a very good sketch and memorizing my personal appearance—or so I suppose, as I appeared in *Punch* a week or two later.

For myself, I needed the sun for my sketch and the cloudy sky for my fishing; so long as the sun shone I worked, but as soon as it was veiled by heavy clouds I rushed into the river and fished.

At the end of a lovely afternoon the sketch was less bad than most of mine, and I had caught thirteen good trout. We both enjoyed ourselves hugely, and writing to me later, and referring to that day, my friend expressed himself thus: 'It was a great day and while possibly Cotman *might* have done the sketch better, I am quite certain he would not have caught the trout.' *Might* have done the sketch better? But then I said he was a humorist.

To those who are keen fishermen, and have artistic leanings—and I feel sure there are many such, even if they have never exploited the latter quality—I commend this truly fascinating combination.

While on the subject of painting, why is it, I wonder, that the beginner, who has never attempted to express himself or his views in colour before, almost invariably selects what most artists would admit is the most tricky and difficult

medium, water colours—a fascinating medium when handled by the masters, but, oh, how incredibly difficult!

A friend once told me that Mr. Wilson Steer said to him: 'Every good water colour is a fluke, but some people fluke more often than others.'

For myself, I apparently have never fluked at all. From time to time I have tried, but the chances against fluking would seem to be very great. My last effort was disastrous. After the first half-hour it was really bad, but in some amazing way, impossible as it appeared, it continued to get worse and even worse, until in a fit of frenzy I seized the board and spun it into the river. But this also was a failure. The board went on spinning, and missing the river completely, lodged in a crevice of the cliff on the opposite side. I could not bear the thought that this dreadful thing should survive, and it took me quite twenty minutes of hard stone-throwing to dislodge it from the cliff. It did, however, eventually fall into the river, and I can only hope that Middlesbrough, thirty miles distant, was its first stop, and that by then it may have looked a little better.

Of course all painting is impossible, but the beginner in my opinion will get much more value out of an oil sketch box, and to me at any

SKETCHING IN WADERS

rate a bad oil sketch is less dreadful than a really bad water colour.

But to get back to fishing.

Even when absorbed in sketching, there is much to be learnt of the kindred art of fishing. Some feeding fish is marked down for destruction in ' the rest ', and his diet noted, while studying the tone and colour of that piece of water. If there is no rise, the disturbance of the water may show where some cannibal is hunting minnows on the shallows, and that may save the sketcher fisherman a blank day. The fact that he is a fisherman must surely add something to his understanding of running water, even if he is incapable of reproducing it.

There is another thing which adds to the attraction of fishing—I refer to the fact that never for a moment in a day by the river is the mind idle : always and all the time is the keen fisherman thinking out and analysing the reasons for his success or lack of success.

The patience which is considered so necessary for the fisherman is a very active form of patience ; it is, in fact, not patience at all, but rather a capacity to persevere in a series of experiments, or in the testing of various theories.

In order to fish well, absolute concentration is necessary, and consequently it is the greatest dispeller of worries and pains. The mind of the

fisherman is always active and his faculties tuned up to concert pitch. The senses of sight and touch especially are abnormally developed and acute over long periods of time. In this respect fishing has much in common with painting, and at the end of the day the good fisherman is not only physically but mentally tired.

CHAPTER II

WET FLY FISHING

Difficulties—A Popular Fallacy—What is a Wet Fly ?—The Nymph—Comparison with Dry Fly—Hints to the Beginner.

I MUST admit that, in writing of Wet Fly Fishing in the North of England, I am writing about a branch of fishing which, from the age of seven years old, I have practised and loved. To me there can never be any branch of the sport which can hold quite that place in my affections. It presents to me so many difficulties, and never for a moment in forty years of experience has it palled.

There has never been a day of all those days when I have not had to think and worry out little problems ; nearly always I have felt that I have learned something to add to my collection of fishing lore, and each day, whether successful or not, has left me with the devastating knowledge that I know practically nothing about the habits of the trout.

Herein lies so much of the attraction of fishing. If it was simple and trout easy to catch, if one had learnt all there was to learn of one's subject, the catching of trout would be a truly wearisome affair. Thank goodness it is difficult, and it is indeed a day ill spent when one cannot learn

something. Always one is fighting against the possibility of defeat. It is difficult to go into the actual fishing of the wet fly, but because I love it I am going to try.

First then let me mention at least one popular fallacy. I refer to the fact that, strange as it may seem, there still exists among a certain class of fishermen an idea that the wet fly man stands on a rock, and trails three or four flies downstream, preferably on a salmon cast, and hopes that something will eventually bite one of the flies. There are people who do this, but they are few, and always beginners. Why the competent wet fly fisherman should be branded in this way—why, because he fishes wet, he should be denied even a small measure of intelligence, has always been a mystery to me.

Let us go into the matter from the start. What is the wet fly man doing? What is he attempting to represent? What, in other words, does he hope the trout will think his sunken fly is? There is surely only one answer to this. The trout may, if he fishes well, take his sunken fly for a nymph—a fly which, having hatched out on the bed of the river, is coming up to the surface to become the complete fly and reproduce its species.

If the wet fly fisher is representing anything at all, he is either representing that, or a drowned

fly, a spent fly. Can this be represented by trailing three flies against a strong stream? Obviously it cannot, and so the thinking wet fly fisherman—and wet fly fishermen *do* think sometimes—sets to work to see how best he can bluff the fish into imagining that his lures are nymphs.

First of all, he does not fish downstream, because that obviously is wrong. He either fishes directly upstream or up and across, in almost the same way that he would fish dry, but with this difference—whereas with a dry fly it is sometimes a distinct advantage to have slack line, in order to prevent the possibility of drag, the wet fly must be quite straight, and from the moment the fly lights upon the water, the hand which holds the rod must be in touch with it.

Here there may be a little drag, because, after all, the nymph, in propelling itself towards the surface, is probably going slightly—very slightly—faster than the stream, and I would say to the beginner: Fish your fly the same pace as the stream; lift the point of the rod to keep pace with the stream; but always make certain of being in touch with the fly. If you do this, you will automatically fish with just that infinitesimal drag which is necessary, and which gives life to the nymph.

There is one more rule I would lay down for the beginner, and that is, never fish a yard more

line than is necessary. Sometimes it is necessary to fish a long line, but with every extra yard you become less in touch with your fly.

Comparisons are odious but sometimes instructive, and I would like to make a comparison between the difficulties of wet and dry fly fishing. To start with, I am going to make a suggestion that I am aware will horrify many, and that is that, in my opinion, the wet fly when properly fished is by far the more difficult of the two.

The reasons for my making this apparently revolutionary statement are the following. Let us take the two methods with their attendant difficulties and try to compare them, and first let us take the dry fly.

The dry fly fisherman's method is roughly this : he goes down to the most likely stretch of his river and scans the water for the sign of a feeding fish. Let us suppose that, after some time, he finds a good fish feeding under the far bank of the stream he is fishing, with a patch of weeds, or a stake, or some obstacle between him and the feeding fish.

Here is where his difficulties arise. There may be little cover and the water crystal clear, and he must make up his mind exactly how, and from which point, it is easiest and best for him to cast. He must not be seen, the shadow or flash of his rod must not be seen, and the fly, the right

WAITING FOR THE EVENING RISE

fly, must be beautifully cast above the fish and pass over him without any drag whatsoever.

Those are the difficulties to be overcome as I see them, and they are very genuine and sometimes almost insurmountable difficulties.

To have a decent chance of success the cast must be almost perfect first time, and there may be a downstream or cross wind with which to contend. Yes, these seem to me to be very real difficulties, but if they can be overcome, that is where the difficulties end.

The dry fly man has so much more data to go on; the intelligence department has given him so much more definite information. For instance, he knows roughly on what particular fly his fish is feeding; he knows by observation exactly where his fish is lying, and he can see his fly. The fish which takes a floating fly must practically break the surface of the water, and striking, if not dead easy, is so much easier than the wet fly striking.

I have said above that the fisherman knows from observation exactly where the fish is lying, and I have assumed that he has selected for his offensive a stationary fish, in a fixed feeding position; but even if he is a cruiser, and it has been possible to study his beat sufficiently, it is easier for the fisherman to know where he is than if he had never seen a rise at all.

I have tried to put the case as fairly as I can

for the dry fly fisherman, but his troubles end, as far as I see it, after the stalk and the cast.

Now let us take the wet fly fisherman. Before he decides where to go to fish, he must think out where, in the particular height of water on that particular day, the trout are most likely to be feeding. This depends on so many things—the time of year, the time of day, the height of the water, and the hatching ground of the fly which the trout are most likely to be taking at that season of the year.

In all probability, having arrived at the river, he will have nothing whatever visible to help him in his decision of where to fish and what fly to use. In all probability he will not see a fly all day, and he will not see a trout rise. He will be confronted with a mile or two of water, with no indication of any sort as to the whereabouts of the fish or the source of their food supply, and if he waits for a rise, he may wait for weeks. Unless he is more or less steeped in trout lore, he has not got a hope.

Even if he knows *where* his trout are feeding, he has no means of ascertaining their diet, short of trying the most likely flies at that time of year. If he is unlucky, he may try a dozen before he finds the right one, and having found the right one and caught a trout, the feeding period may come to an end and he must start all over again.

But let us suppose he has been lucky, that he has found almost at once—through knowledge of his river over a long period, and the habits of the fish in different heights of water—the actual feeding positions of the trout on that particular day, and, after one or two changes, the right pattern and size of fly. His difficulties have only just begun, for every single place he fishes needs different treatment and different control of the line after the cast, and always the hand that holds the rod must be in absolute touch with the fly.

In fifty per cent of cases the trout, when he takes the fly, never breaks the surface of the water. If you feel him, it is almost invariably too late ; therefore the striking, the most difficult and most important of all the attributes of the wet fly fisherman, must be determined by something which I can only explain as a sixth sense.

Sometimes, in a good light, there is to be seen, by those trained to see it, a distinct flash of the fish turning ; more often it is something more subtle, something *unusual* in the form of the water, some unnatural bulge or movement among the waves of the stream. At its best it is almost uncanny, an instinct that has been acquired after years of experience and practice, and if you asked the expert why he struck, or how he knew that the fish was there, he could not give you any very helpful answer. Was it what he saw ? No !

Was it what he felt ? No ! But the reason had in it something of both the senses of sight and touch. It is inexplicable.

In this, the wet fly's most important factor, the difficulties are surely with the wet fly man. He does not see his fly, he does not see his fish, and if he is slow he loses every time. To sum up, then, the wet fly man knows not where his fish are, what they are feeding on ; he does not see his fly, and in a large percentage of cases he does not see the rise.

The dry fly man sees the rise, knows where his fish is to a foot, sees his fish break the water and his fly disappear. Where the dry fly man needs possibly greater skill is in the actual cast ; but to me this is more than counteracted by the other difficulties experienced by his brother of the wet fly. No man can be a really good wet fly fisherman who has not been blessed with remarkable natural eyesight, acutely trained.

As far as the above comparison is concerned, I am quite aware that there are many who will not only disagree with me, but think that I am mad to put it forward at all. I do hope, however, that among my readers I shall find some who will agree, but if, as may be, I have no adherents, I shall only blame my lack of skill as a writer for my failure to convince.

But enough of these comparisons. This purports to be a chapter on wet fly fishing, and if

by any hints to the beginner I can make him enjoy better sport, I shall be amply repaid.

To the expert I have nothing to say, because most probably he knows much more than I do. To the beginner a few practical hints may be of use, and these can be divided into three general headings :

1. Where to fish.
2. How to fish.
3. What to fish with.

1. *Where to fish.*—When trying to make any suggestions on the above heading, I must take one river or groups of rivers of the same character, and even then a great deal of what I have to say must sound obvious. I take as my example, then, the north country rivers in the Dale district of Yorkshire. These are much like the Scotch mountain streams, inasmuch as they vary in height and colour from hour to hour. The stream may be a trickle at twelve o'clock, but a teeming torrent half an hour later. Where to fish depends on the height in inches, and also the season of the year.

Any guide as to where to fish must depend so much on the conditions of the moment that it becomes very difficult to lay down any laws at all. I am inclined to believe that the best way to attack this very difficult question is in the form of a purely negative statement—by which I mean

that the preceding paragraph should be headed 'Where *not* to fish', rather than 'Where to fish'.

Let us, then, take our extremely variable river, and make some attempt to explain where not to fish, from the time it is a flood to the time it is dead low.

Most of the truths about fishing are really so obvious that it seems futile to write them down. It is, for instance, obvious that in very high and coloured water it would be of little use to fish a fly in the main stream. Under these conditions I have found that, generally speaking, trout are most likely to feed either on the tails of long pools or on the edge of the river, where the stream comes in at the head of the pool.

Especially in high water does success depend on where to fish or where not to fish. Many of the fish one kills on such a day are killed in what is ordinarily dry land; but such are the mental processes of the majority, that I have known fine fishermen attempt to fish the low water lie of the fish when it was such a torrent that it was impossible for any fish to feed in it.

I have found that, in high water especially, trout in the northern streams are liable to feed in patches or shoals. Especially in high water, success depends more on finding those patches of feeding fish, and less on the actual lure employed.

I remember one experience which taught me

much. The river was very high, and most people would not have fished at all, but I decided to go out, because there were one or two places where I thought I could get trout.

I had just started down to the river when I met a friend, who asked me what on earth I was doing with a rod, and assured me that I was a lunatic. He said that the river was far too high, and that fishing was a waste of time.

Rather piqued by his attitude, and thinking that I knew more than he, I wagered that I would kill a dozen trout for dinner. I had three hours to do it in, and at the end of two hours my basket was still empty. I was soaked to the skin, and had almost given up all hope of connecting with anything at all. I was some way from home and I was tired; almost I admitted defeat, but there was one more place where I thought trout might be feeding in that height of water.

This was a long pool, perhaps two hundred yards long, and lay round the next bend of the river. I decided that I would go to the corner, look down the long stretch, and if I saw a fish move, I would climb round over enormous boulders under a cliff and fish it up. If after a few minutes I saw no signs of life I would own myself defeated.

We went to the corner, and eventually at the far end of that stretch I saw two fish move. We

both climbed round under the cliff, and in that last hour I caught sixteen of the best trout I have caught in that river.

I could have caught more if I had stayed, but there was something I wanted to find out for certain, and that was the question as to whether my success depended on a universal rise or on the place I was fishing. So I left the spot I was fishing, with the trout still feeding, and went and fished again the best, or what I considered the best, of those places I had already fished without success. I failed to move anything whatever!

I have mentioned this in an attempt to convince my readers as to the truth of my original statement that, under those conditions, more depends on finding that patch or group of feeding fish than on the actual pattern of fly used.

So much then for fishing a wet fly in exceptionally high water. Under these conditions, after all, there are only a comparatively few places one can fish, and the next day becomes even more difficult.

To take our negative theory for a start, we may assume that the low water lies, or feeding positions of the trout, are still out of the question and so in a general way I would suggest the tails of the pools, or some long flat on the edge of the deeps—by which I mean just the point at which you lose sight of the rocks and stones on the bottom, through the peaty water.

BELOW THE FALLS

Of course, in all these remarks I refer to fishing during the daytime, because when it gets dark the big trout frequently come out into the shallows to feed in not more than a foot of water.

Again, whatever height the water may be, the position of the feeding fish must depend on the hatch of fly, and where those flies are hatching. In a general way, I presume most of the flies hatch out from the shingle or gravel beds, in comparatively shallow water above the deep pools.

In these northern streams at any rate the feeding fish get as near to the source of supply as possible, and are not content to wait for the floating fly at the tails of the pools, if they can get the nymph at the heads of the pools.

Therefore, if the wet fly fisherman sees a definite hatch of fly being ignored almost completely on some long pool, I would recommend him to reel up, go to the very head of the pool, and fish a hackled fly of as near the pattern on the water as possible, and he will seldom be disappointed. The lower the water gets, and the warmer the weather, the more do the trout move up into the shallow runs in search of food.

When the river becomes low, or lower than the normal, the place to fish depends so much on the conditions of the moment that I find it impossible to make any suggestion ; but if I had

to generalize, I would say that the lower the river the higher up in the stream one should fish.

Now let us take the second heading: *How to fish*. Here I would repeat that, to the expert, I have nothing to say, but to the beginner I may provide some short-cuts and be of a little assistance.

I do not for a moment suggest that my methods are necessarily the right ones, but only that they are the methods that I personally have found, after forty years fishing, give me the best results. Here they are, for what they are worth.

Fish upstream, or up and across; never fish a yard more line than is absolutely necessary; always keep in touch with your fly, and strike not hard but as quick as it is in you to strike. If it is necessary, draw the line through the rings with your left hand, so that there is never any slack or uncontrolled line in the water.

Your attention, your keen attention, must never be taken off the point at which you imagine your flies to be. Absolute concentration on every movement of every cast is an essential to success, and the moment you relax you fish badly. If you see a fish rise, cast so that your fly drops on the spot where he rose, or possibly a foot above it, but not more.

When fishing upstream with a short line, try, as you lift the point of the rod, to let your top

dropper just touch the water for a yard or two; you will kill many fish in this way. What you are doing then is to prolong the transition stage of the nymph to the fly for a second or two, and I believe, if you were to fish upstream with three flies of the same pattern, you would kill more fish on the top dropper than on the other two together.

If the trout show any marked preference for one of your flies, change the other two and fish three of the same pattern—this seems so obvious, but very few fishermen do it.

I remember one day having had indifferent sport, watching a local fisherman on a north-country stream killing fish after fish with no apparent effort. He was fishing with the most primitive tackle, and would never have impressed the outsider with a great idea of his efficiency—but he had a basket *full* of good trout!

For myself, I had the latest thing in rods and reels, 4x casts, and *flies* of every pattern, and a beautiful basket, though an empty one.

I wondered at his success and went to fathom it. His cast was of horsehair, and he was fishing with no less than seven flies of exactly the same pattern—black spiders. Whether he had, by fishing seven of them, induced the fish to believe that there was a hatch of black spiders I cannot say, but he had caught an extraordinary number

of very good trout, and according to the locals, he always did.

Now some idea of No. 3 : *What to fish with*—in other words, the tackle for this particular branch of fishing. Different people have different ideas on this subject, and again I would like to repeat that my remarks and suggestions are made with the sole object of helping the beginner, and not in any way an effort to foist my ideas on those who have had enough experience to possess definite ideas of their own.

Personally, I always fish with a very light rod, for two reasons—one, that if a heavy rod is used with the very fine tackle necessary in my opinion for success, one is apt, however careful one may be, to break on the strike, every now and then ; in the second place, owing to an injury to my right hand, fishing with a heavy rod is out of the question.

I am lucky enough to possess a real gem of a rod for this purpose. It is a two-piece split cane rod, 8 ft. 6 in. in length, and weighs something just under four ounces. Three flies on an untapered 4x cast is what I always use. I have tried 5x points, but do not think it is worth the chance of breaking, and 4x is as fine as I can safely fish. On this strength, I have killed fish up to four and a half pounds in the rough water of a Yorkshire river.

As a rule I find hackled flies the best, and if a winged wet fly is used I always make a point of destroying its spruce appearance before using it. One is attempting to represent the nymph, and the wet fly fisherman's flies should be very lightly dressed. The following list may give some idea of what to use during the different months of the year :

MARCH

February Red.
Greenwell's Glory.
Blue Dun.
Red Spinner.
Olive Dan.
Blue Upright.
March Brown Spider.

APRIL

March Brown (Male).
Do. (Female).
Do. (Spider).
Woodcock and Hare's Ear.
Needle Brown.
Light Partridge and Yellow.
Dotterel and Yellow.
Woodcock and Orange.
Olive Dun.
Sand Fly.
Grammon.
Gravel Bed.

MAY

Stone Fly.
Sand Fly.
Iron Blue.
Blue Maxwell.
Greenwell's Glory.
Willow Fly.
Olive Dun.
Partridge and Yellow.
Snipe and Purple.
Whistling Dun.
Bracken Clock.

JUNE

Alder.
Oak Fly.
Blue Maxwell.
Broughton Point.
Water Cricket.
Redquill Gnat.
Blackquill Gnat.
Black Spider.
Dotterel and Yellow.

July
Iron Blue.
Blue Maxwell.
Woodcock and Hare's Ear.
July Dun.
Yellow Sally.
Dotterel and Yellow.
Wren Tail.
Orange Sedge.

August
August Dun.
Jenny Spinner.
Willow Fly.
Dun Midge.
Black Spider.
Broughton Point.
Iron Blue.
Dark Brown Sedge.
Blue Maxwell.

September
Greenwell's Glory.
Black Gnat.
Redquill Gnat.
Cinnamon Fly.

This evening I have had an experience which seems to confirm something I have written in this chapter.

Going down to the river at about five o'clock, it was dead low; I noticed the swallows flying very low, and skimming the surface of a pool. On approaching nearer I found that they were picking a small dun from the surface of the stream. Although the birds were feeding on the floating fly, the trout apparently were not. It was a small dun, dark in colour and seemed to be the Iron Blue. For a little time I fished where the swallows were busiest, with no results at all. I needed seven trout for dinner, and in just over an hour I caught eleven good trout at the head of that pool, by fishing two Blue Maxwells, which was the nearest thing I could get to the nymph of

that dun. I never saw a trout rise on the water during that hour, but all the good trout were feeding on the nymph at the head of the pool in the rough water.

Wind, Light, and Other Conditions

Is there any fisherman who will agree with his brother as to what exactly makes a good fishing day; what are the conditions of light and wind, which, if he could manufacture them, he would select?

This question, in my opinion, is a very difficult one, and would be variably answered. Let us take, for instance, the question of an east wind generally supposed to be about the worst possible wind from the hopeful fisherman's point of view, though I have never been able to get a satisfactory explanation. The only reason I have ever been able to extract from anyone who fishes is that an east wind is generally a cold wind, and would consequently be unsuitable for a hatch of fly.

Surely this is a somewhat weak explanation, assuming that the wind is so cold that it would destroy instantaneously any fly which reached the surface of the stream. Why should that matter at all to the wet fly fisherman? It cannot surely affect to any serious extent the temperature of the water, or the season at which any particular fly is due to hatch out, and, practically speaking,

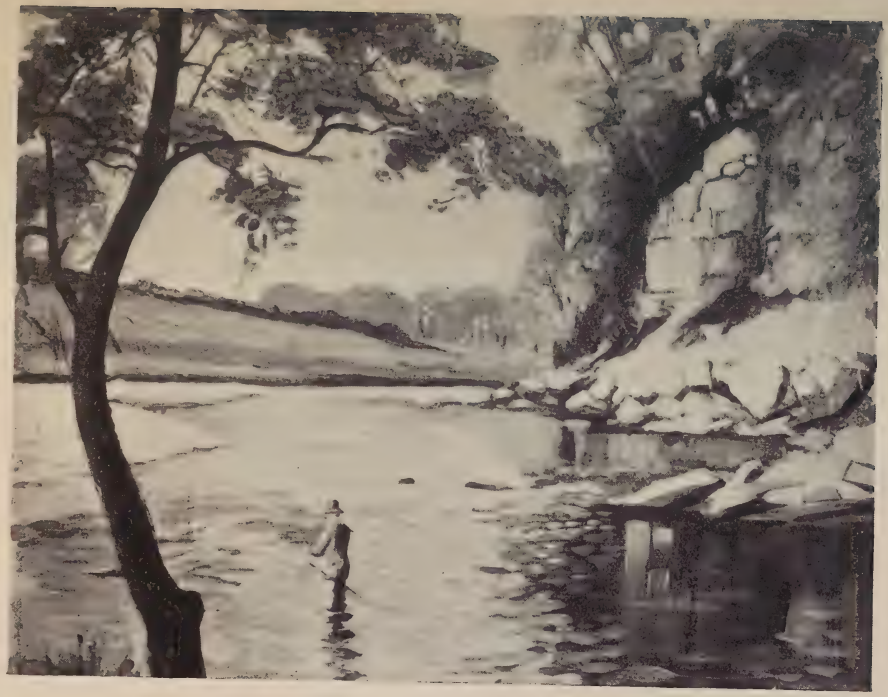
the wet fly man is not seriously concerned as to whether the fly lives or dies when it reaches the surface, provided it can hatch out at the bottom of the river.

The fact that the fisherman himself is almost perished with cold and in danger of contracting pneumonia need not necessarily concern the fly at all, and if it does not concern the fly, why should it concern the trout ?

Personally, the one thing I pray for, from a fishing point of view, and which I have come to consider as one of the chief conditions which may lead to success, is an east wind. The reason for this is not that I imagine trout rise more freely, or that flies hatch out in greater profusion during the period in which the east wind is blowing, but that, when this condition obtains, I can fish my river better because it flows from west to east.

It is impossible to punch a fly into a western gale and present it to the trout in anything like the way in which Nature would present it, whether it is wet or dry.

When I lived on the west coast and fished a river in Wales, I longed for the west wind to blow. My impression is that the actual direction of the wind is not in itself a very important factor in the composition of a good fishing day, except in so far as it affects the capabilities of the fisherman to fish well.



WET FLY ON THE TEES

The really good fishing day depends on so many conditions, and that, I presume, is why it comes so very seldom. A point which plays a more important part is the condition of light, and this is a problem which seems to me well-nigh insoluble. How can we ever know what the fish sees or how the light can affect him? We can carry out exhaustive experiments with glass tanks from the bottom of the river; we can photograph flies from every angle, at every time of day, from varying depths, in order to find out exactly how the fly and cast appear to *us*—but we cannot possibly be certain, at any rate with the experience and knowledge at our disposal at the moment, whether or not the fish sees what we see.

It seems to me, therefore, that until science has advanced sufficiently to give us more knowledge in this respect, these elaborate experiments can hardly be of much practical assistance to the fisherman.

My conclusions on the light question are due to experience and not to any scientific solution. I am discussing light now purely from the wet fly fisherman's point of view, and from that point of view there is one condition which is well-nigh fatal to sport, and that is bright and continuous sunshine at whatever time of day. Even a 4x cast seems then to the fisherman like a silver

rope, and under these conditions I imagine the dry fly has a distinct advantage, because it seems that an object which is floating on the surface of the stream, naturally has few terrors for the trout.

After all, the trout sees many objects floating on the surface of the stream—sticks, branches, patches of foam, and so on—and becomes accustomed to these things, provided always that they behave in a natural manner. Therefore a coiled line floating probably possesses less terrors, however clearly the trout may see it, than a sunken line glistening in the sunshine under water.

I think that most wet fly fishermen will agree with me that the bright cloudless day is his worst enemy. Apart from this question of a bright sun from a cloudless sky, the best light to me is the light in which I am able to fish best.

The wet fly fisherman depends for his success enormously on very perfect eyesight. There are conditions of light, sometimes, affected by the surroundings and background, which render the fisherman practically blind ; the water is inaccurately seen, while the line, where it enters the water, is completely invisible. In these conditions, the fisherman, however expert he may be, is seriously handicapped, and unless he happens to experience one of those inspired days when instinct and timing are both perfect, he may miss fish after fish.

If this is not quite his fault, it certainly is not the fault of the fish; yet many fishermen will say, 'Yes, I have risen a lot of good trout, but they were taking short.' He would surely be oftener right to blame himself rather than the fish!

What actually does a fisherman mean when he makes this statement? Does he mean that the fish does not get the whole of No. 00 hook into his mouth? Surely not! Does he mean that he takes the tiny fly into his mouth, discovers, as he often does, in a small fraction of a second that it is not what he thought, and ejects it? If this is so, then there *was* that fraction of a second in which, if he had struck, he would have killed the fish, and if he failed to do so, the fault is surely his. If I miss several consecutive fish, I know that the fault lies with me, and with me alone, and I curse myself roundly for getting slow or lacking concentration.

The longer I fish a wet fly the more convinced I am that eyesight and striking are about eighty-five per cent of the game, and that the question of light and background has a very definite bearing on this. There are, of course, conditions of light which must help the fish. Which of us has not had the experience of trout rushing away on his approach, however careful he has been to conceal his presence; but this seems to me to depend as

much, if not more, on the background and general surroundings than on the light itself, because it seems to be most noticeable on certain stretches of water or individual pools.

Fishing my Yorkshire river, which, as I have mentioned, flows directly from west to east, there is a light condition which appears to depress, not only me but the trout or salmon, and that is when the sun is getting low towards evening and flaming straight down the river.

If fishing for trout upstream, it nearly blinds the fisherman, and, I honestly think, the fish as well. If fishing downstream for salmon, the fisherman is quite comfortable, but the fish are still blind. I have several times had an experience under these conditions, which, if it actually does not prove anything, must, at least, I think, be an argument in favour of this theory.

There is in this stretch of water one pool, and one only, in which the stream comes round and back in a long backwater, where the feeding trout in the backwater are heading due east. Several times of late years, in the evening, when the sinking sun has been transforming the water into molten gold, having completely failed to rise a trout, I have gone a considerable distance to fish that backwater and never once have I been disappointed. Sometimes it has only been one unfortunate fish, at other times as many as half a

dozen, but always some success when all other places had failed.

Perhaps this proves nothing, but then fishing is a subject in which absolute proof is an impossibility—so many *absolute* proofs only remain long enough to be completely disproved the following hour, day, or year ; but surely this only serves to add one more attraction to this exasperatingly attractive sport.

CHAPTER III

THE DRY FLY

Not really Suitable for North Country Rivers—The Dry Fly at its Best—A Week-end with the Houghton Club—Luck and a Five-pounder—Striking—Timing.

LET me at the outset say that this chapter, on Dry Fly fishing, does not attempt to cover all the intricacies of this most attractive, possibly *the* most attractive, branch of a great sport. I lay no claim to being an expert, and if my readers wish to study the subject, they can do so through the medium of the writings of the great masters of the game, who have given the results of years of observation and a life's experience to the fishing world.

Most of my trout fishing experience has been on northern streams. Here few people fish dry, the reason being that on comparatively few occasions during the year do trout take the floating fly, even when there is a definite hatch, which is seldom. Also the positions in which the trout lie to feed makes the fishing of the dry fly even more difficult than in the chalk streams.

I have seen large hatches of olives completely ignored, while all the big trout were in the run at the head of the pool taking the nymph.

I have had days on which good baskets of trout

were taken on the dry fly, and which have been a great joy to me, but these have been few.

My one experience of the dry fly at its best, in its natural and traditional surroundings, is when I had the good fortune to be the guest of a prominent member of the Houghton Club for a week-end. I have seldom enjoyed anything so much, and the memory of that week-end will remain with me for many days. It was the first week in August, and the weather was grilling; a bright hot sun, a drought, no wind of any sort, and a glare—in fact, every condition which, as a northern fisherman, I had always been led to suppose would make the catching of trout impossible.

My host and I left London at about four o'clock in his car, and arrived at Stockbridge at six—not a bad performance, but my host was and is a very exceptional motor driver. We had an excellent dinner, surrounded by trout of the most immense dimensions in glass cases—nothing less than about ten pounds—and after dinner we set out to fish the evening rise. I had a feeling that if I caught anything less than about eight pounds I should be arrested. My little 8 ft. 6 in. two-piece trout-rod seemed very inadequate, and altogether I felt very much the tyro.

It was a beautiful evening, and as we stood by the river preparing for the offensive, the rise

began as if it had been started by a stop-watch. There was one good fish rising continuously in what seemed to me a rather difficult position, and I was invited to slay him. I did not do so, but although I failed to kill him, I did not put him down, and I felt at that moment that I was disgraced. In my own river, if I saw a fish rise and failed to catch him, I felt, and rightly felt, that there was something wrong with me. It meant that the fly had been presented badly, or at any rate that the fish had discovered that it was an imitation and refused to rise again.

But here was a totally different state of affairs. I probably presented it badly, perhaps there was a drag ; everything seemed wrong, but that fish went on feeding. I left him feeding and proceeded to lay siege to another ; this one I caught, he was, however, under the one and a half pound limit by an ounce or two, and was duly returned.

By this time my confidence began to return, and I felt that my attendant did not look on me with the contempt which I felt I had deserved. I began to feel that it was possible even that he had seen some would-be fisherman who had done it worse, and that was something.

We proceeded up the river and passed my host, who had got one nice fish of about two pounds. We arrived at a pool, with a mill-race

MACHINE SHALLOWS, STOCKBRIDGE

at the head of it, and it was getting very dark. I could, however, see a few fish rising in a sort of backwater on the near side, and two of these I caught. This gave me more confidence.

I had never seen the pool before, and to me it was merely a matter of shadows and lights, with an occasional silver gleam where a good trout broke the surface. Such a gleam I saw under the shadow of the far bank, and my attendant, having put on a large sedge, invited me to hurl it into the gloom where I had last seen that ripple.

I did so, and had only a vague idea as to the whereabouts of that sedge, or whether it was floating or skating about the bottom of the river. But suddenly I saw the gleam again, and being a fisherman and consequently an optimist, I struck and found myself attached to something more than ordinarily solid.

Things then became a little difficult, because I did not know anything about the pool—where it was deep or shallow, whether there was weed or snags—but eventually the fish was netted and he scaled exactly five pounds, and so triumphantly we returned to the hotel. I think of the three—my host, my attendant, and myself—I was possibly the least elated. The fish was an immense fellow to me, but I had just dined in that room surrounded by twelve-pounders, and I felt that five-pounders were caught every day, and that I was

rather in disgrace for not getting more of them. It was not until later that I discovered that some of the twelve-pounders had *not* been taken on a dry fly.

I was lucky, desperately lucky, but, oh, how I enjoyed it!

After that, I spent two happy days sketching that lovely river, and two happy evenings fishing it; but from a fishing point of view, my first evening was by far my best, and we drove back to London on Monday, August Bank Holiday. I love to think that the two sketches I did during that wonderful week-end will hang in the Houghton Club's room at Stockbridge.

Yes, that was a great week-end, and I learned something. I think that it is a bad day when the experienced fisherman does not learn something.

The whole thing was so completely different from my own type of fishing. Many things surprised me, but one thing most of all, and that was that, in that clear water, there were occasions when one could practically stun a fish with a bad cast, yet he would still continue feeding.

Then there was a question which I heard much discussed—the question of striking. There were those who said that you should put the rod down and light a pipe, and then strike—because nearly always you struck too soon. There were those

who said that it was almost impossible to strike soon enough!

My own opinion is that each individual strike depends for its timing on each individual rise, though I am in favour of being too quick rather than too late.

I remember, one day, going down to my river at home, and finding two good fish rising under a steep wall bank. I hid behind a bush, and from my hat took a few dry flies. Having broken the hooks off these, I flipped them into the stream above the fish, and watched. The fish took them boldly, but the incredible speed with which they ejected them after the discovery that they were steel and feather, and the distance to which they shot them through the water, was an education to me and probably influenced my judgment in this respect. I am as certain as I can be that, in the north, with our small trout, if one misses a fish, in ninety-eight cases out of every hundred, it is because one is *too late*.

Every expert, at whatever game, depends very largely on timing. In cricket, golf, lawn tennis, boxing, perfect timing is the greatest essential; so why not in fishing? Timing in casting, a different timing with or against a wind, and timing in striking; more important than anything else, the timing for each individual rise. It is impossible to lay down any rule which will

cover all the circumstances, and I cannot think why anyone ever attempts to do this. What would be right in one case would be completely and hopelessly wrong in another. If I was compelled to lay down any rule, I should simply say, judging from bitter experience, better too soon than too late.

The dry fly has an attraction all its own, and I can well understand how and why its devotees practise it to the exclusion of every other form of fishing.

First of all, one has to discover a feeding fish on a long stretch of water, and then to think out how best to fish for him, what there is in the way of cover to take advantage of in stalking him, to find out or try to find out the fly on which he is feeding, the exact colour, size, and dressing, and then eventually to make, perhaps under difficult circumstances, the perfect cast which will lead to his undoing, the momentary wonder whether he is deceived or not—all this must have an immense appeal to the true fisherman, and it would be sheer lunacy to allow any other form of fishing on a club water on one of the chalk streams.

It is a highly specialized and skilful branch of the sport, and possesses an attraction all its own, but there is one type of dry fly fisherman who will admit of no other branch, and who would

sooner commit a murder than kill a trout on a wet fly, and this is a point of view which I find it difficult to understand. To me, dry fly fishing is possibly the most attractive branch of a great sport, but it is only a branch and it could never be the whole tree. It has its own difficulties, its own infinitely attractive technique, and its own marvellous surroundings, and I sincerely hope that I may be privileged to practise the one and enjoy the other on many more occasions, but it will always be to me a *branch* of fishing.

CHAPTER IV

BAIT FISHING FOR TROUT

(*a*) Clear Water Worm

Conditions—Where to Fish—Wind—Drag—Tackle—Hints to Beginners.

THERE are days in June, July, and August when fly fishing in the North of England rivers, in the daytime at any rate, is a singularly unremunerative pastime — days and sometimes weeks when the rivers are but ghosts of their natural selves, mere trickles in a broad expanse of shingle; days when the glaring sun shines with uninterrupted strength and brilliance from a hard, cloudless sky, and when no definite hatch of fly lures the trout to the surface.

Surely every fisherman has experienced such conditions. Perhaps these are the very conditions that obtain during the whole of a fortnight's fishing holiday, a fortnight dreamt of as only a fisherman can dream of these things, a fortnight schemed for, longed for, and looked forward to, with that incurable optimism which must inevitably be part of the make up of the really keen fisherman.

If under these sad circumstances the fly fisherman has no alternative plan of attack, or if by

any chance he is so pure a purist that he would scorn to employ such alternative, then the passing of that fortnight becomes something like a tragedy.

The alternative is, of course, some form of bait fishing. Under the conditions mentioned above, the clear water worm will probably prove to be the most deadly. It is a branch of the sport of fishing which requires a good deal of knowledge and a considerable amount of skill.

In the summer months, when the water is very low, the good trout appear to leave the deep still pools which are their home, and take up feeding positions in the shallow running water above ; it is in such places that the clear water-worm expert looks for his best sport.

Somehow the very shallowness of the water adds an unexpected thrill to the taking of a large trout. There is a sense of self-satisfaction, and mentally one pats oneself on the back and says, 'How clever of me to know that a fish of that size was likely to be found in such a place, in six inches of water.'

Somehow, one never quite gets over the feeling that the deeper and more mysterious the pool the larger must be the fish !

There is only one weather condition that is, I think, fatal to worm fishing, and that is a strong downstream wind, when it is sheer waste of time.

The science of worm fishing can be summed up in one short sentence: 'The worm must arrive at the fish exactly as if no hook was attached to it.' This sounds fairly simple, yet it is never simple, and when a strong wind is blowing down-stream, it is an impossibility. This must always be the object of the fisherman; the chief thing he has to fight against is drag, but drag is very difficult to avoid, and is just as fatal to success in worm fishing as it is with the dry fly.

With the object of eliminating all drag, and making the worm appear as natural as possible in the clear low water, the very finest tackle must be used—nothing stronger than 4x. The reel line should not be too heavy, and if the rod is specially used for this branch of fishing, it should be longer than the average fly rod, because, as is evident, the longer the rod and the shorter the line the less drag there will be. There are several kinds of tackle: the ordinary single hook, which gives the worm a somewhat unnatural appearance; the Stewart Tackle, which has three hooks, and in my opinion gives the bait too stiff an appearance; and the Pennell Tackle, which consists of two hooks.

Personally, I carry a packet of eyed hooks, about No. 11 or No. 12, and tie them directly on to the cast. I believe this to be the most natural way of all, and the simplest. It is quite worth

while to use a twelve-foot cast, because, whereas it is perhaps more difficult to handle, it reduces resistance to wind and water to the irreducible minimum.

As in every other form of fishing, no more line should be used than is absolutely necessary. Sometimes when there is a slight downstream breeze, it may be an advantage to attach one No. 6 shot about eighteen inches above the bait, as this may help to counteract the inevitable slight drag by the wind. As a rule, however, no lead should be used at all.

The bait must be delicately cast directly upstream, or up and across, and the point of the rod raised so that the pace at which the worm comes towards the fisherman corresponds exactly to the pace of the stream.

When fishing short runs or ripples between stones, it is an advantage if possible to cast the worm so that it alights just *above* the tiny waterfall which is the head of the miniature pool, comes down over the fall, and so becomes sunk and fishes naturally from the commencement. When the line stops, wait a couple of seconds and then strike downstream sharply but very delicately. It is a fascinating and highly skilful form of fishing. The casting is by no means easy, and the control of the line after the cast varies with each little pool fished.

If well fished by the real expert, it is very deadly, and the fisherman is seldom bothered by small fish. It has also one great advantage, for it is possible to fish in rivers and streams which are so densely overhung with trees and bushes that any form of fly fishing is out of the question.

If this very skilful and attractive branch of fishing forms part of the fisherman's tactical equipment, the tragedy of that wasted fishing holiday will often be avoided.

(*b*) The Natural Minnow

An Encounter—Education—Tackle—Spinning—Kelts—One Kelt in Particular—A Dilemma and a Tragedy.

Some years ago I found myself with a house in Wales, and within a few miles of that house flowed a river well known as one of the best sea trout rivers in Wales.

It was, however, almost entirely a club water, and like most club waters it was considerably over-fished.

Although a good sea trout river, I had heard little or nothing as to its possibilities for brown trout, and one day, under perfect conditions, I set out to satisfy my curiosity on this point. The water was beautiful and the weather conditions were those which I had always been led to suppose constituted a good fishing day.

Full of hope, with a certain amount of skill and very good tackle, I fished a perfect stretch of water with wet fly and dry fly for a great many hours. I caught nothing! At least, no trout more than six inches in length. My entire day's work consisted in removing smolts and orange fins from the hook every few seconds, and at the end of that day I wearily came to the conclusion that there were no brown trout in the river at all.

On passing over the bridge, on my homeward journey, I met another fisherman, who was the gamekeeper of a friend of mine. He had caught many trout, and large ones withal; so we sat on the bridge and discussed trout fishing in all its forms.

'Morris,' I said, 'you did not catch these trout on a fly?'

'No, sir,' he replied. 'I was sent out to catch trout for the house, and I caught them on a minnow.'

Then we talked at some length on minnow fishing and how it was done. It was a subject about which I knew practically nothing, for minnow fishing, to me, was represented by the artificial bait alone. I had fished a Devon and a Phantom at various times, on various rivers with indifferent success, but knew nothing at all about the fishing of the natural bait.

Just before I left him I asked when he intended going out again, and if I might accompany him.

Some days later we set out together to fish the natural minnow. The first thing we did was to catch the minnows. The little backwaters were full of them, and in a very short time we had a couple of dozen, which were enough for our day's fishing. The tackle he used was simple—a 3x cast, ending in a loop and a leaded hook. The minnow was threaded on to the leaded hook, with a baiting needle through its mouth and out of its tail, and then attached to the cast.

It was not a particularly attractive form of fishing as he fished it, but it caught fish, and the good ones which could never have been taken on any fly.

The minnow was cast into the heads of pools and allowed to roll down with the stream until a trout took it. As soon as a fish took the bait, the line was slacked off, to allow it to go off with the minnow, in some cases for a considerable distance, and gorge it. If there was any check, the fish would probably drop the bait, so it required a good deal of touch on the part of the fisherman.

The actual striking and catching of the fish after this was, of course, comparatively simple.

I learned much during that day, and what I learned formed the basis of many happy and profitable days' trout fishing on that river. There were trout in the river and they could

be caught, and that was something to start with.

Thereafter I went to a great friend of mine, who was secretary of the fishing club, and together, on many of the happiest days of my life, we fished for trout with the natural minnow. We improved upon and developed the original idea ; we fished finer and we fished in different places. We fished *not* the runs at the head of the pools, but the shallow water above the pools, and we fished it almost as if we had been fishing a clear water worm.

We caught the big fish—fish which we could never have taken on a fly except possibly on two or three days in a year, and whose staple food was, in that river, minnows, minnows, and more minnows.

At last there came a time when, on that short stretch of water, the trout were more difficult to catch, even with our minnow as we then fished it, and something had to be done about it. Also we became tired of this business of letting the fish gorge the bait, so we started spinning the natural minnow in low water.

All the known tackles were tried, and eventually one was evolved which seemed simpler and more efficient than the rest. We made them in the evenings, in the garage, out of safety pins and bits of tin, and they were responsible for the destruction

of more trout than I care to think about. We used a small spinning rod, and a two and a half inch malloch reel with a fine undressed spinning line.

One of our troubles in the spring was the kelts. It was only safe to fish the very shallow runs, and even then trouble sometimes awaited one in the form of a great hungry beast, of about twenty pounds, which at best took up a lot of valuable time, and at worst departed with possibly the last spinning tackle one possessed, and so ended the day's sport.

I remember well one such case. Only one spinning tackle remained to me, and it was seized in shallow water by a large kelt ; with the utmost care I strove to save it, for I was a long way from home and the day was yet young. But luck was against me, and eventually the kelt decided to leave me, and take with him the spinning tackle.

I sat down sadly on the bank, saying things about the universe in general and kelts in particular. What was to be done ? Must I walk lugubriously home, some five miles, without my dinner ? Never ! A committee meeting was called, consisting of myself and my Welsh keeper, and after some deliberation we decided unanimously to search that run for the degraded fish which had tried to spoil our day's sport, and do

our best to return to its rightful owner that lost spinner.

The river was low and the water gin clear, so we searched for the culprit, and presently we were rewarded. Looking over a steep clay bank, I found protruding from the root of a tree a large tail! A running noose of thick twine was soon made, a forked stick cut, and all preparation for the offensive duly made.

During the next few minutes events moved rapidly. With infinite skill and care my accomplice with the forked stick steered the running noose over that tail, and on a given signal I pulled and went on pulling. The result was wonderful!

Out of the water, tail first, came a very well mended kelt of about twenty pounds, up a slippery grass bank, and all seemed to be going according to plan. But I slipped, and as I slipped, the kelt started to return to his native element. As he went, my accomplice caught him, flinging himself at him; but the fish butted him in the wind and took it, doubling him up, and as he doubled up, the thick part just above the tail hit him in the jaw and knocked him out.

By this time I had regained my feet and took a hand in the game, and eventually—although well-nigh overcome by laughter—managed to quiet the beast and carry out a search for my spinner.

I searched, but, alas, the spinner was not there, The kelt with which we had argued was completely innocent! So the noose was removed, the kelt was returned, quite happy, and the scales having been removed from my keeper's face, we sadly walked that five miles home without our dinner. Where my friend of the spinner had hidden himself I cannot think, but my apologies are due to the tail that protruded from the tree root, though I think he scored most of the points in that particular game.

There were, of course, other difficulties. For instance, sometimes it was not easy to catch the minnows, more especially in cold, windy weather, when the surface of the water was ruffled and it was impossible to locate the shoals of minnows. Bottled or preserved minnows I have never found to be of any use in clear water, possibly because of the smell of the formalin in which they are preserved, so for the success of this branch of fishing it is necessary to have fresh minnows. At first I used to carry these in a live bait tin, but afterwards I found that the easiest way was to put them in an old pickle bottle, three parts full of water, and screw the top on tightly. Then, as long as one was moving, the water became sufficiently aerated, and at the end of the day the minnows which had not been used were returned to the river.

There is one bitter experience which will remain with me all my life. It was in April, and the river was full of kelts, but I had had a bad day and trout were very difficult to come by. In fear and trembling, I decided to take a chance and fish a deepish pool.

Behind me was a clay bank and a lot of high gorse bushes. I had only had a few casts when the inevitable happened, and I became firmly attached to a large kelt, which proceeded very rapidly downstream.

It was impossible to stop him with the tackle I was using, so I decided to test a theory that I had often heard advanced, but which I had never had the pluck to try myself with a fresh fish, for fear of losing him.

As I say, my kelt was going downstream and almost out of the bottom of the pool, far too fast. I did not care whether he got off or not—in fact, if he had got off it would have been a blessing. So I turned over my little malloch reel, and let the line run off slack.

In theory, the fish, finding the strain relaxed, ceased to go downstream and returned to where he had started. I put my little rod down on the bank, with the reel still turned over, and lit a cigarette. When I reeled up the slack line the theory had worked, for my kelt was back exactly where he had started from.

That was something to the good, but my troubles were by no means over. Very bored with the whole business, I sat down on the bank and played that fish, with the one object of retaining one of my last two spinners, and eventually, just before he was tired enough to be tailed, I discovered that he was a fresh fish and a very good one at that—he must have weighed nearly thirty pounds, and salmon fishing did not commence until the next day (May 1st)!

During the last minute of that struggle I decided what I would do. I would kill the fish if I landed him, and hide him in the gorse bushes which lined the bank behind me, returning for him on the following day.

At last he was landed, and I had selected a suitable rock with which to dispatch him, when through those gorse bushes where he was to lie for the night came two people—the president of that fishing club and the head-keeper.

I do not wish to dwell on what followed, and the memory of that great broad back, as he swam away over the shallows into the deep whence I had taken him with so much difficulty, will remain with me as long as I live.

If the president had been alone, all would have been well; if the keeper had been by himself things might have been otherwise—but when the two were together, this was the only solution!

CHAPTER V

Part I

SALMON FISHING

Life-History—The Scale Theory—Comparison with Trout—The Glorious Uncertainty—The Unexpected—Feeding in Fresh Water—A Theory—What Lure ?—The Favourite Fly—Size—Prawn Fishing—What is a Salmon Fly ?—The Peril—An Irish Fisherman—Hints to Beginners.

I DO not propose to go into the life-history of the salmon, although that life-history is an absorbing study, chiefly, I imagine, because comparatively little is definitely known about it.

A certain amount has been ascertained about the salmon's life in the rivers, both in his first two years, before he goes down to the sea, and also of his habits on his periodical return journeys. But what actually happens to him in the sea itself, where he goes for those years, and what his habits actually are, these things are still veiled in mystery.

I would recommend the would-be student to study the various works and pamphlets issued by Mr. Hutton, whose experiments in marking fish on the Wye, and whose development of the scale theory, have done so much for the fishermen of this country, and to the proper understanding of the preservation of our salmon rivers.

The salmon is the largest game fish in the rivers of the British Isles, and quite apart from the sport he affords to thousands of enthusiastic fishermen, he should be much more carefully looked after and preserved than he is, because of his great value as a food-supply. I speak with some feeling, because my own river, the Tees, has been ruined by pollution at Middlesbrough.

It is difficult to compare salmon fishing and trout fishing, because the two sports have such a completely different basis. There is an old saying which affirms that 'any fool can catch a salmon, but that it takes a fisherman to catch a trout'—and there is undoubtedly some truth in this.

Any fool *may* catch a salmon, because the salmon more or less frequently does the most amazingly unaccountable things for no apparent reason, and herein lies a great deal of his attraction.

'The glorious uncertainty of salmon fishing!' How often have I cursed that 'glorious uncertainty', especially after four or more consecutive blank days; but such is human nature that, if every time the keen fisherman threw his fly or his bait into the water, he caught a salmon, he would soon become so bored and exhausted with the work that he would never fish again.

It is the unexpected that really matters; it is the hope of the unexpected that makes us say at

the end of a tiring day with an aching back and shoulders, ' Just half a dozen more casts ! '

It is the hope of the unexpected that eventually turns those six casts into nine, or even twelve, before we finally reel up and own ourselves defeated ; and it is still the hope of the unexpected which sends us out the following morning full of optimism, full of excuses for the previous day's failure, and full of reasons for the present day's success.

Oh, yes, the keen fisherman is an incurable optimist, because, if he were not, he would not be a keen fisherman at all, and fortunately for him the unexpected does happen sometimes.

The beginner, without any knowledge, *may* catch a salmon, but the chances against his catching a good trout would be very considerable. In trout fishing the natural insect, or at any rate the normal food of the fish, must be more or less correctly and naturally imitated if the fisherman is to have any chance of success ; but this is not so in salmon fishing, because the salmon does not feed in fresh water.

The fact that he is unable to feed in fresh water, or at any rate is unable to digest food, makes it difficult to decide with what bait or lure it is best to fish and for what reason.

A salmon fly, if it represents anything at all, certainly does not pretend to imitate or look like

any known fly. A Devon minnow or spoon can hardly be supposed to look like any known fish, while a large scarlet boiled prawn, tail upwards, against perhaps a strong stream, is a spectacle surely which no salmon can ever have met.

Everything, without exception, with which the salmon fisherman attempts to catch salmon, can have no resemblance whatsoever to the natural food of the fish.

I have said that the salmon does not feed in fresh water, and surely this fact has been at long last sufficiently proved. Some fishermen, however, exist who will stoutly deny this, and the reason for their disbelief is the fact that the salmon will occasionally take and swallow a bunch of worms.

With regard to this matter I have a theory of my own, which I have never heard advanced by anyone else. To the question 'If the salmon does not feed in fresh water, why does he take a fly or a gudgeon or a prawn?' I have heard various answers, all of which, no doubt, have in them a good deal of truth.

One fisherman will say that the fish rushes at the fly or bait in a fit of irritation or anger, in order to bite it or kill it, but not to eat it, and sometimes I believe this is undoubtedly the case. Another fisherman will affirm that the very fact of the lure or bait being completely unnatural

A SALMON POOL ON THE YORE

is the reason for its success, because in nature, with animals as well as fish, the diseased or abnormal member of the community is destroyed by its brethren for the good of the race, and here again I am certain there exists a great deal of truth.

Why, for instance, should a salmon select a bad imitation of a minnow, doing about a thousand revolutions a minute, when if he requires minnows for food there are probably two or three thousand in a near backwater which he could catch without any trouble ?

There is truth in both these theories, but neither of them quite covers the ground. They will account for a fish taking a fly—a Devon or Phantom minnow, a gudgeon, dace, sand eel, or any other spinning bait, and then the disbeliever plays his trump card. Why, he says, if a salmon does not feed in fresh water, does he take a bunch of worms ; and not only take them but swallow them, so that the hook is somewhere down in his stomach ? Not all the annoyance in the world, nor the desire to kill the abnormal or diseased, will account for this, and so the disbeliever is left winning the odd trick. What I believe myself is this :

The salmon leaves his native element, the salt water, where he has developed the habit of feeding, perhaps all day, perhaps at certain times

of day, or in certain conditions of tide, and he enters the fresh water with that habit on him, and with every intention of continuing his normal life. He does not know—how should he?—that he will shortly be unable to digest anything at all. He enters the river with the firm intention of feeding on anything that may be good for food; he definitely tries to feed in fresh water, and as long as the desire for food lasts, he will continue to try.

Admittedly there are two salmon which are comparatively easy to catch—the fresh fish and the kelt. The fresh fish, because he has just left the sea with the feeding habit still strong upon him, and the kelt because he has performed the functions which brought him to the river, and is due back very shortly, so the desire for food and the return of the feeding habit is becoming increasingly insistent.

The fish which is generally almost impossible to catch is the one who has been up in the river long enough to have lost his desire to feed, and has realized the dismal fact that he can no longer do so with comfort, or in fact, at all. Which of us has not had the experience of dozens and dozens of salmon showing all round us, and assiduously fished for hour after hour, without one of them taking the least interest in anything we throw in? The only hope under these

conditions, I always think, is the surprise attack, and the more unnatural the lure and the more abnormal its presentation the greater is the chance of success.

In my opinion, therefore, the salmon usually takes the fly or bait, and especially the worm, because he wants it for food; however, he is like the patient with incipient jaundice—he is hungry, very hungry, and he eats; after which he is most probably sick, but he eats again, unless he is prevented, and hopes for the best. The longer a fish has been in the fresh water the more difficult is he to catch, until after he has spawned and the feeding habit starts to reassert itself. It seems to me that this theory does cover all the ground.

If the above is so, the question naturally arises, with what lure, fly, or bait shall we fish for salmon, and what will give us the greatest chance of success?

Let us take the fly for instance. I am not at all certain that all the tradition as regards patterns of salmon flies in various rivers is not just an inherited tradition. A, B, and C, let us say, swear by three different patterns and sizes of flies—A the Jock Scott, B the Wilkinson, and C the Butcher.

In a year's fishing each kills more salmon on his favourite fly, not surely because it is any better

than the rest, but just because it is continually being fished. At the beginning of the day each man puts on his favourite fly and gives it every chance, and only after exhaustive experiment with it in all the best places, and when it has failed, does he change to some other pattern, and then only for a short time. As soon as he decently can he readjusts his mascot and starts afresh, cursing the wasted half hour with the other pattern.

For myself, I have not bought a salmon fly for fifteen years, but have tied all my own, and a good many other people's as well. I used to think that the pattern of the fly did not matter very much, so long as it swam properly and the size was right. But what is the right size, and why on earth should it matter so much ?

The accepted theory is that large flies should be used in the spring, and very small flies in the summer. Apparently this is intended to keep pace with the decreasing feeding propensities of the fish. Some rivers apparently have to have larger flies than others, and of course there are occasionally definite and unanswerable reasons for this.

The Thurso, for instance, where a fly less than three inches long is seldom fished. I have fished the Thurso, and the only thing which surprises me is that the salmon is able to see even a

three-inch fly, so deep is the peat stain in the water.

Whatever the salmon fly may or may not represent, it certainly does not look like any form of flying insect. It may more or less represent some form of subaqueous insect, or a fish or crustacean, and in that case why should the size vary with the time of year ? Fishermen in general seem to me to be strangely conservative as regards this matter of size, and at the same time strangely inconsistent as regards salmon fishing in general.

For instance, a really good fisherman will go out on a day in July or August when the water is dead low and clear, and will fish probably with a fly not bigger than a No. 8. Having failed to do any execution with this, he will probably try one even smaller, and this may or may not be successful.

If, however, it is *not* successful, he would as soon kill a policeman as fish with a 5/0 or 6/0 fly. Then, in a fit of desperation, he will clutch the bait rod from his ghillie, and hurl into the water an immense scarlet prawn, covered with triangle hooks, and about half a pound of jardine leads—to say nothing of swivels, which themselves are as large as the flies with which he has been fishing, He will expect to kill salmon, and furthermore will quite likely be successful.

Why should a large fly be so frightening to the fish in low water if the prawn is not? Surely this is inconsistent—not that I object at all to prawn fishing; quite otherwise: I consider that to fish a prawn properly requires more skill and knowledge than any fly fishing, but I cannot see why a fly an inch in length should be considered excessive, when a four-inch prawn, complete with leads, etc., is all right.

The ordinary salmon fly, call it what you will, is only a lure after all. The chief attribute of a salmon fly in my estimation is that it should swim properly. In order that this may be so, it is necessary that the fly should not be overdressed. I consider that the large majority of stock patterns, tied generally by people with no practical fishing knowledge, are so overdressed that they possess no 'life' whatsoever, and this is very noticeable in the larger sizes. In these the hook itself is so heavy that, in slack water, the fly does not swim horizontally, and I much prefer the fly tied on two light hooks, one behind the other as in Fig. 1; because then the wing and the body swim horizontally and more or less together, whereas in other ordinary dressing the fly is apt to swim with the body detached from the wing (Fig. 2) and thereby lose all its life and character.

The longer I fish for salmon the more convinced

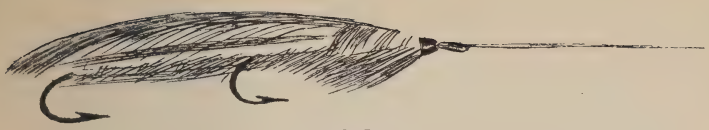


FIG. I

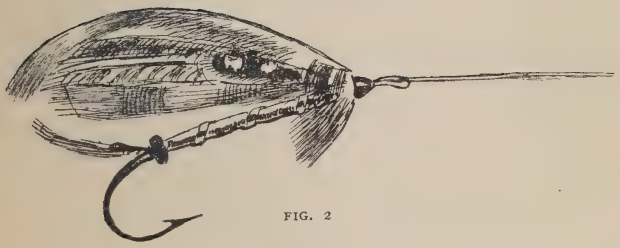


FIG. 2

THE YELLOW PERIL

do I become as to the efficacy of this type of lure in the large sizes, especially in slow-running water. Also I am certain that in low water in the summer a large fly dressed in this way will kill fish when the orthodox tiny salmon fly fails.

Some years ago, as an experiment, I tied a fly on these lines. It was about four inches in length, and consisted of a silver body and a yellow wing, with a Golden Pheasant topping over all, and it was christened the 'Yellow Peril'. At first it was not successful, and I forgot about it; but the day came when everything else had been tried in vain, when the Peril accounted for three good fish in forty-five minutes. Since then my faith has never been shaken, and I have fished with Yellow, Red, Blue, and White Perils with equal success.

It is on the same lines as the Norsk Lure, but with this difference—that it is tied much lighter, that it is on two hooks on gut, instead of one long hook, and is in consequence more flexible. It is a lure and not a fly, so I am told, but what is a salmon fly?

After all, the only difference between the salmon *fly* and the artificial bait is that one is fished deeper than the other and with a different rod and reel. The thing is not a *fly* at all, and it has always been a mystery to me why the fly fisherman should assume that air of superiority

over all other fishermen; frequently he accuses the bait fisherman of being a poacher, and impresses on all and sundry the fact that nothing would induce him to fish with anything but a fly—just because in ninety-nine per cent of cases it is beyond him.

A good many years ago, in Ireland, I saw a man fishing a fly, as I thought, beautifully, and I said to my Irish ghillie: 'Mr. So-and-So is a very fine fisherman, don't you think so?'

'Yes, yer honour,' he replied. 'He's a dacent fly fisher.' That gave me to think.

Up till that moment salmon fishing had consisted in fishing for salmon with a fly; but in Ireland, however good your execution in this particular branch, you were not worthy of the name of fisher unless you also knew how to fish every conceivable bait. So I started my education as a salmon fisher. After many years I still think that fly fishing is the most attractive way of catching salmon, but also I think it is the easiest way.

Whilst on the subject of salmon flies, a few hints to the beginner on how to fish a salmon fly may not come amiss.

There is one definite rule: never fish a yard more line than is necessary; in fact, go out to fish, and not to cast. The salmon, as compared with the trout, comes very slowly to the fly, and

it is as well to give him every chance. If you can cover a fish with a short line, keep out of sight and more or less hang it over him. You are much more likely to succeed in catching him than if you cast a long line, which would be correspondingly less under control.

Cast downstream at an angle of forty-five degrees, and having made your cast, keep in touch with the fly and control it if possible, so that the line is always kept straight. Success depends much more on the control of the line and fly, after the cast, than on the actual cast itself. Many beginners fail to realize this fact, and having made a good cast, they allow the fly to look after itself. Try to avoid as much as possible having a ' belly ' in the line.

This, I think, is the best general idea as a basis, but of course each pool will require different treatment, and I do not advise anyone to adhere too slavishly to any set of rules.

I knew one fisherman who had a great reputation as such, and who most certainly killed a lot of salmon on the Wye. He always fished his fly straight across the pool, at right angles to the bank, and let it sink very low in the water. There was always a belly in the line, so much so that during three-quarters of each cast the fly was travelling very fast, head downstream.

His theory was, that if he could get the fly to

straighten and turn upstream, just over the lie of the fish, it was almost irresistible. I think that there was a good deal in the theory, but in my opinion he worked it to death. I have found it successful when the ordinary method failed.

There are many ways of fishing a fly, and one may be successful where another has failed, and it is therefore a mistake to be a slave to any particular method. Sometimes a fly, fished very deep, will be most successful, while at other times, especially in low water, better results are obtained by fishing the fly right on the top, and greasing the reel line. All these variations of fly fishing come only by experience, and I believe that the first is the best for all general purposes. If the beginner masters this—and it requires a good deal of mastery—the others will come quite easily.

As far as casting is concerned, I am perfectly certain that no amount of written matter can teach it. It is like most other sports, or rather games, so much a matter of accurate timing. But there is just one tip which has helped me in the past, and in fact still helps me, and that is : if you find yourself casting badly, select an imaginary point on the opposite bank, ten or twelve feet above the water-line, and cast at that. That tip, I am sure, is worth any fisherman's while to remember, and after forty years of fishing it still helps me.

The length of the cast is a very important matter, and personally I always use one from twelve to fourteen feet long, and I find it is much pleasanter and easier to fish with than the regulation three yards.

For fifteen years I have used nothing but gut substitute, and have found it in every way preferable to salmon gut; there are no knots, no glint or reflected light, and it is stronger. The greatest possible care, however, should be taken when tying on the fly. The ordinary figure-of-eight knot is quite useless, and owing to the presence of a certain amount of natural oil or grease in the composition of the gut substitute it will, when wet, slip so easily that the fishermen can hardly feel it go—especially is this so if flies with metal eyes are used.

This has given the substitute a bad name, and many fishermen will not use it in consequence; but it can easily be overcome, and there are plenty of simple knots which are quite safe.

The above is intended to refer only to the salmon thickness, and when I have tried the substitute for trout it has proved most unsatisfactory.

The beginner can always learn from the more experienced fisherman, but, as in other arts, he will eventually and inevitably develop his own technique, and it is a great mistake to take too

much for granted even from the expert. What is not apparently generally admitted is that the most experienced fisherman, if he can only keep an open mind, can often learn from the beginner. We are all apt to become hidebound, and to have what we imagine to be irrefutable ideas about our own methods and our own rivers.

Our methods are surely always capable of improvement, while the lies of the fish vary in every river from year to year, and even sometimes from month to month, as the bottom is altered by heavy floods and the currents become different. Nothing progresses without experiment, and fishing is no exception. The experimentalist, while he may waste a good deal of time, wins in the end, and may eventually even add a little to the very meagre knowledge of the sport.

We are all apt to find out some little thing for ourselves, some experiment which has ' come off ', and, having found it out, to ride the thing to death, and eventually become just as pig-headed in our adherence to it as the man who has never experimented at all.

I would advise the beginner who wishes to extract the greatest amount of pleasure from the sport of salmon fishing, having first of all attained to a certain standard of skill—the alphabet, so to speak, of his craft—to keep an open mind, to

listen to those who have had much experience and study their methods, yet not to take it all for granted, but to think the fishing problems out for himself, and conduct his own experiments on his own lines—and to go on experimenting!

He will be looked on with derision and disgust by a certain type of ghillie, who, while he is trying his experiments, will turn his back on him and make no effort to conceal his utter boredom and contempt. He will, of course, have many failures and lay himself open to that unforgivable expression, 'I told you so'; but he will have also his triumphs, and although they may be small, they will be very sweet, while all the time he will be developing fresh interest in the sport, opening up new channels of thought, and ever adding to his skill and prowess as a fisherman, to his store of fish-lore, and to his knowledge of the habits of that most unexpected and unaccountable fish—the salmon.

I have said earlier in this chapter that I consider it impossible to teach the art of casting either a fly or bait by writing about it. The long descriptions of how to do these things have never been of the slightest use to me, at any rate. There are, perhaps, those with a completely different mental equipment to myself who may be able to learn from written instructions; but to me it seems so impossible, and

such a second-hand way of learning, that I feel that if I were to try to explain it in this book I should only be wasting my reader's time and my own.

My advice, therefore, to the would-be salmon fisher is to go to some expert friend, or to some good professional teacher, in order to learn the rudiments of casting, and then to work out his own salvation, first of all on the lawn, and thereafter on the river itself.

He will, in my opinion, learn more with a capable and intelligent instructor in a quarter of an hour than thousands of pages of literature could ever teach him. But here is one word of advice to the beginner; he should not trust to his own judgment as to the choice of a salmon-rod or line.

The choice of a rod is the most important thing to the beginner, and just as important is the fact that he must have exactly the right weight of line to balance the rod. I have my own marked preferences in this respect, but I have no intention of mentioning the name of any manufacturer.

After all, my opinions are only my own, and I realize very thoroughly that my point of view is not necessarily the only one, nor even the right one. I have, however, often been asked my opinion of the merits of a rod by some

beginner, and in many cases the weapons these wretched people had been using would have been equally ineffective in the hands of the greatest expert that ever lived. It is pathetic to think that the beginner has for weeks and months been blaming his own lack of skill for the dreadful results he has obtained.

I can remember many such cases, but one in particular stands out vividly in my memory.

The rod, a new one, in which the owner had the greatest pride and confidence, was so incredibly stiff that it would have been over-stiff had it been a bait rod. This was bad enough, but in order to make it not only difficult, but quite impossible to cast at all, my friend had selected a line no heavier than the average dressed spinning line.

No fisherman in the world could possibly have done anything with it, for the reason that the line did not begin to bend the rod. It was, in fact, rather like attempting to cast a silk thread with a punt-pole—it just could not be done. My friend was, I think, somewhat hurt when I told him exactly what I thought of his equipment, and not until I had induced him to fish with my own rod did he believe that my scorn of his outfit was inspired by anything but jealousy.

The beginner should have the best possible

equipment—not necessarily the most expensive —in order to give himself every chance. So again I repeat that he will save himself hours and weeks, perhaps years, of agony by putting himself into the hands of a really good judge, and not trusting to his own judgment.

Although I do not think that the art of casting can be taught through the medium of written matter, there is a subject about which written advice may be very useful. I refer to the playing or killing of the salmon after he is hooked, and in discussing this part of the sport of salmon fishing, very much depends on the size of the rod and the strength of the tackle employed.

So, for the purposes of this discussion, let us suppose that the fisherman is using a fourteen-foot rod and what is generally known in this country as a ' grilse ' cast.

From time to time, in the daily Press, or in the *Fishing Gazette* or *The Field*, appear long accounts of Homeric struggles with immense salmon. Often in these accounts the fish escapes, but sometimes he is landed ; unfortunately, when landed, instead of scaling some fifty pounds, he is generally much nearer fifteen. Nevertheless, these battles always extend over a period varying from one to six hours. Perhaps the circumstances are so abnormal that the fishermen may be excused ; but for myself I cannot imagine

such circumstances, and I am bound to say that the majority of these stories appear to be little else than a written confession of inefficiency and lack of knowledge or experience.

In forty years of salmon fishing it has never been my lot to take more than half an hour over any fish, and very seldom more than fifteen minutes. The fish which took me longest was one of forty-five pounds, in the Gudvangen River in Norway, and he was foul-hooked, about a foot above the tail.

In playing a fish, I am convinced of one thing, that there are many more salmon and trout lost by letting them do what they like, than by being too hard on them. Provided the rod is perpendicular, it is practically impossible to break a good cast in any fish.

Anyone can prove this conclusively for themselves. Hold a salmon fly by the bend of the hook, between the forefinger and thumb, and ask anyone to pull it away from you while holding the rod perpendicular. It cannot be done. The breaking strain of a good salmon cast is about six or seven pounds. I very much doubt whether it is possible to exert a pressure of four pounds, or even three, by means of a perpendicular fourteen-foot rod. Of course the moment the point of the rod is dropped, any pressure may be brought to bear on the fly and cast. I am aware

that this is all very obvious, but so very few fishermen make real use of the knowledge that I feel it is worth mentioning.

The chances are that when the fish rises and is hooked he is some distance downstream from the fisherman. From the moment of the strike the fishermen's object should be, if it is at all possible, to get opposite or just below his fish. The salmon will usually fight against the direction of the strain, and if he is allowed to remain below the fisherman, he will fight downstream—in which case the stream is doing nearly as much work as the fish. If the fish can be induced to fight upstream he kills himself.

The fish should be given no rest, but a continuous uninterrupted strain should be kept on him unless he jumps, and even then the strain should not be wholly relaxed. Always attempt to get back as soon as possible every foot of line you have lost after a long run by the fish, and if you can get him turned and coming towards you, keep him coming. Just before he is gaffed when near the bank, try to exert a side strain on him rather than a vertical strain, which does little good.

During the whole performance the rod should be kept practically perpendicular.

The above are a few of the points common to every struggle, and they are written here only in

the hope that they may prove of some use to the beginner. Again I repeat it that it is my firm conviction that there are more good fish lost by being too easy than too hard.

Part II

BAIT FISHING

Knowledge of the River—Deep ?—How to Fish a Prawn—Prawn Fishing and a Norwegian Ghillie—Bait Fishing Detrimental to Fly ?—Another Irishman—Spinning in Low Water—Lies of Salmon in Low Water—Hints to the Beginner—Casting and the Choice of a Rod and Line—Playing a Salmon.

Fly fishing, to the average salmon fisher, will always be the basis of the sport and the most attractive branch of it. The bait, artificial or natural, will most probably only be used when and where the fly has failed ; but no salmon fisher can be considered a first-class exponent of his art unless he can manipulate a bait rod and reel.

Greater knowledge of the river is necessary to the exponent of the prawn than is necessary in the case of the fly fisherman. He must possess a more or less accurate knowledge of the bottom of each pool, its depth, and the strength and weight of the current in different heights of

water, to say nothing of knowing the exact position of any large rocks or other snags.

This is so because, to be most successful, the prawn must be fished as near the bottom as possible, and as the ordinary prawn tackle is armed with at least two fairly large triangle hooks, the lack of such knowledge results in one of two things: (*a*) the loss of prawn and tackle in the bottom of the river, or (*b*) a prawn not sufficiently leaded to have a fair chance of success.

Of course the salmon, being the odd creature he is, will occasionally do the most unaccountable things, and will take a prawn which is skating about the surface of the stream. But this fact proves nothing, and I think every bait fisherman will agree with me when I say that the man who fishes his prawn lowest in the water catches the most fish.

Time and time again, especially in Norway, when the height of the river varied hourly, I have fished a pool down two or three times with the amount of lead I thought necessary without touching a fish; then, risking the loss of my tackle, I have added more weight, and have met with immediate and continued success. The salmon frequently will not move an inch from where he lies to take anything, but if the prawn practically rubs against his nose he will very often take it.

I explained this at much length to a friend of mine who was anxious to try prawn fishing. On that particular morning the supply of fresh prawns had got rather low; in fact, we had only twelve between three of us. We took four each and went our various ways to different beats, and it was not until the evening when we met that my friend told me what he thought of me and my advice.

Apparently what had happened was this: he had fished a fly for some hours without success, and then suddenly remembering his four prawns, had decided to try them. He had one old prawn tackle without the needle, and had no idea of how to attach the prawn. So he tied it on to the prawn tackle with string, with its head facing up the line. He then discovered that he had brought no leads, but having taken so much trouble to attach the thing, he decided to throw it in. This he did with his fly rod, exactly as if he was fishing a fly.

The prawn skated along the top of the water, with its whiskers floating over its back, and in two consecutive casts it was seized by two salmon, both of which he killed. He told me that when the fish took it, the prawn was making a wave like a toy boat behind it. 'That,' he said to me at the end of the recital, 'is the way to fish a prawn.'

It may be! Anything *may be* in salmon fishing, but I do not think it is the best way. In prawn fishing, as in fly fishing, much depends on the control of the bait after the cast, and the fisherman's object should be to make his bait arrive first in front of the fish—that is to say, before the line or leads—and to fish it as deep as possible without becoming caught in the bottom.

Each pool will require a different treatment, with weights according to the depth, strength of the stream, etc., but, generally speaking, the bait should be cast more directly across the stream than would be the case in fishing a fly. This gives it time to sink before it arrives at the lie of the fish.

The prawn is, I think, probably the most deadly of the low water baits, and also the most difficult to fish really well. There are places where it is impossible to fish the prawn in the ordinary way—for instance, in a pool which is very shallow, except for a deep narrow channel down the middle, where the fish lie under shelving rocks. If the bait is cast with sufficient weight to sink it in the channel it is bound to get caught up on the far ledge, or, when reeling in, on the near ledge.

I know several places of this description, and the only way I have found of dealing with them

THE SECOND SALMON POOL

is to go to the head of the run, and holding the point of the rod over the stream to let the prawn down by allowing the reel to run almost free.

This sounds very simple, but it has its difficulties. If too much weight is used, and the line is allowed to run out a little too fast, the prawn sinks and remains attached to the bottom. It is only when the fisherman reels up, thinking that he has fished the whole run, that he discovers the fact that the prawn has never been more than about ten yards from his feet. If, however, he uses too little lead, and does not allow the line to run out fast enough, the bait fishes too high in the water to have a real chance.

I have become convinced on one point in connexion with prawning, and this is the distinct advantage of the fresh prawn over the bottled variety. Of course it is not always possible to get a supply of fresh prawns daily, but if it can be managed I am certain that they are the better of the two. The prawn is essentially a low water bait. I do not know why this should be the case, and it may be that I have not given it a sufficiently good trial in high water; however that may be, my experience has been that some other form of bait gives better results than the prawn, when the water is high and coloured.

There seems to be an idea amongst some fishermen that a prawn is a bait which can be

fished with success only in the summer or autumn. When I went to Norway for the first time I was emphatically assured by my ghillie that it was useless to fish with a prawn until late August. Like a fool I believed him, and for a fortnight my friend and I fished with every form of fly, without any result. In the tail of the bottom pool of our beat we could see in the middle of the day eleven good fish ; but nothing seemed to interest them in the slightest degree.

On the morning of the fourteenth day, having as usual shown them every brand and size of fly, I had a long and heated argument with the ghillie. He told me again that it was useless to fish a prawn until August 15th. It was then about June 15th. Rather bitterly, I asked him if it would be still useless on August 14th. He replied that he thought it would. The sheer idiocy of this remark decided me, and in the evening I came down armed with a bottle of prawns and a spinning rod.

I shall never forget his expression of disgust and his utter boredom when we started operations ; but that evening we took five of those eleven fish, and the following morning four more. After this experience it was all I could do to induce him to let me have the fly rod at all.

There is also another very prevalent idea which gives the prawn and the prawn fisher a

bad name, and that is that it is useless to fish with a fly after the prawn has been used, at any rate for two or three hours.

I am convinced that is also a popular fallacy, chiefly because I have so very often disproved it. I do not believe that prawn fishing spoils the fly fisherman's chance at all; in fact, I am inclined to go even further and say that I am not at all certain that it does not improve it.

I knew one of the best fishermen in the south of Ireland, a good many years ago, who always said that if he could get a salmon to move at all he had a good chance of catching him. He preferred fishing a fly to anything else, and his usual procedure was the following: he would first fish a pool down carefully, with the pattern and size of fly he considered suitable; if he was unsuccessful, he would then put on an immense fly, which he kept specially for the purpose of 'stirring them up'! If that failed to catch anything, he fished the original fly down again.

Thereafter he would fish a prawn, and then come back to his fly again, and quite frequently be successful.

Time and time again I have killed fish on a fly immediately after having fished it carefully with a prawn.

I think the prawn is much maligned; after all, why should it be so disturbing and so fatal?

This year, in April, my boy and I killed six fish averaging twenty pounds in one pool in an hour. He was fishing a fly, and I a large golden Devon minnow. If this is possible, and the sight of large Devons and twenty-pound salmon dashing about the pool did not interfere with the fish taking, why should a prawn fished once down a pool have this disastrous effect? Altogether we took eleven fish out of that particular pool, not a large one, during the day, and the last two were taken on a fly. Surely, then, the bait fisherman is not always to blame for the fly fisherman's lack of success.

I have purposely taken the prawn as a pattern of bait fishing, because in my opinion it is the most difficult to fish properly, and if it is mastered the spinning baits—such as the Devon, phantom, gudgeon, dace, or sand eel—are comparatively easy.

They are all fished in almost exactly the same way, and perhaps it is not so important that they should be fished quite so deep. This is a matter of opinion, and I know many who will disagree with me.

For many years I considered that all the spinning baits—artificial spinners in particular—were of little use except in high water; but of late years I have found reason to qualify this statement. Salmon can sometimes be caught in

the lowest clearest water with a small one-inch Devon, fished on fine tackle, and it is a most attractive form of fishing with a small seven-foot-six or eight-foot trout spinning rod.

In some rivers this will often be successful when the water is considered too low for a fly. The most likely places to fish, under these circumstances, I have always found to be the heads of the pools, in the rough water higher up in the stream than the usual lie of the fish.

I first discovered this when the water was so low that I considered any successful salmon fishing was almost out of the question, and I had therefore taken out a trout spinning rod to try to catch a few trout.

I caught no trout at all, but killed two very nice salmon, both of them lying in places where one would least expect to find them.

I think, when the river becomes very low, that salmon often move up into such places for one of two reasons: either that the water is more aerated or that the broken water forms more cover for the fish and he is less likely to be seen by his enemies. The salmon in fresh water, and more especially in a small river, is rather like a wild animal in a cage, and the less water there is in the river the less cover there is in the cage. So it may be that he goes to the rough, broken water in order to hide himself more effectually.

A few hints to the beginner in bait fishing may help him to start.

For general purposes, I should recommend a bait rod of about eleven feet, strong but not *too* stiff, and fitted with porcelain rings. As for the reel, he must make his own choice and learn how to use it. The various makes all have their own advantages and disadvantages; I have tried most of them, and have come back to an old friend which is now out of date and unprocurable.

There is one thing, however, which it might take the novice a long time to discover, and that is the importance of the spinning line and its selection. With the type of reel which has a revolving drum, the actual thickness and consistency of the line makes all the difference to the efficient working of the reel, and the pleasure or otherwise of fishing.

The line should be as fine as possible, consistent with strength, undressed, but of a *hard* texture. The thicker the line the more difficult it is to cast and the more chance there is of overrunning. Naturally, with an undressed silk line, great care must be taken not only to dry it carefully at the end of each day, but to test it every morning before starting.

It is also as well to test it after it has been subjected to any considerable strain. If, for

instance, it has been necessary to pull very hard in order to extricate the bait from some rock or snag, one frequently finds that a certain amount of the line has lost its strength and toughness. If the line is not tested, this may result in the loss of the next fish hooked. The trace should not be too long—about four feet is a good length—and should have at least two double swivels.

I have only attempted to describe very shortly what may be called the ordinary bait fishing; there are, of course, all sorts of possibilities and variations, such as fishing a shrimp on a single hook, and all these may be the subject of profitable and interesting experiment by the bait fisherman when he has mastered the ordinary methods.

Bait fishing is only in its infancy, and is capable of infinite development. The salmon fisherman, like the trout fisherman, has never stopped learning, and even if he has had sixty years' experience he is still a beginner. That is why fishing can never lose its fatal charm!

CHAPTER VI

SEA TROUT FISHING

Habits in the River—Need of Local Knowledge—Flies—The Demon—The Estuary—The Demon Vindicated—The Effect of the Tide—Bait Fishing—The Secret of Success.

THERE are many fishermen who, if asked which form of fishing in Great Britain took first place, would unhesitatingly answer sea trout fishing; although this would not be my answer, there is much to be said for the sea trout.

He possesses many qualities calculated to endear him to those of us who derive our pleasure from skill with rod and line. He is very often a free riser, and when hooked shows wonderful fighting qualities.

The habits of the sea trout vary in certain respects from those of the salmon. If there is a definite run of sea trout, they arrive in greater numbers than the salmon, and consequently the 'glorious uncertainty' is not *quite* so insistent. Although to me he has neither the subtle attraction of the trout nor the weighty majesty of the salmon, I can see his points and appreciate them. I spent ten years on a first-class sea trout river in Wales, and have to thank this game little fish for very many happy hours.

The sea trout seem to come up their favourite rivers in shoals or batches, and distribute themselves over the various pools—the larger fish taking up their positions in the deeper water of the pool, with the smaller fish behind them.

This does not mean that in a pool a hundred yards long, and containing let us say two hundred sea trout, there are two fish to every yard fished—the larger fish in the deep water and the smaller ones in the shallows. What is much more likely to be the case is that in seventy yards of water which looks to be perfect there is nothing at all, and that all the fish are concentrated in the remaining thirty yards. Possibly these may be all together, or in two patches of fifteen yards each, or three patches of ten yards, and this is where local knowledge, and a close study of the river, is of such inestimable value—more so, I think, with the sea trout than with the salmon or brown trout. The lie of the fish depends very largely on the height of water, and that again adds to the difficulties of locating the shoals.

Often I have seen the hopeful fisherman, in body waders, standing in the exact place where the fish were wont to be, and casting into a likely part of the river which, in ninety-nine days out of every hundred, contained no fish at all. No doubt I have often done exactly the same thing myself. There is no way of finding out

or ascertaining the lie of the fish other than a careful study of the river over a period of years.

In trout fishing, and even in salmon fishing, most fishermen with some years of experience behind them could make a good guess at most of the likely lies, even in a strange river. But with the sea trout he would very often be so wrong that half of the day might be wasted in the attempt to extract, from a lovely stretch of water, fish which did not exist there.

I hate to think of the many hours I have spent fishing likely-looking water in which later experience has taught me that no sea trout ever lay—stretches of water fished with the utmost care and concentration, but all to no purpose, and often I know that I must have left off fishing just before I came to the real lie of the fish.

The sea trout varies considerably in size in different rivers, but in the British Isles it rarely exceeds fifteen pounds in weight; although fish of seven or eight pounds are in many rivers comparatively common, the large majority would seem to run between two pounds and five. Fish of this size seem to rise more freely than the larger ones, but this may only be because they are more numerous. In most sea trout rivers, provided that there is an adequate stock of fish, the fly fisher has every chance of success, because the sea trout as a species is a free riser, and can

be caught with a fly in almost any height of water.

Generally speaking, sea trout fishing with a fly in fairly large water is exactly the same as salmon fishing, except that the rod and tackle are lighter and finer and the flies or lures smaller. The fly is fished in the same way, and the object of the fisherman should be to keep as straight and well controlled a line as possible.

The ' flies ' proper with which I have had the most success have been of the hackled variety, while on the Welsh stream, which I fished for ten years, I eventually used little else, until one day, many years ago, when apparently nothing was of the slightest use. Winged and hackled flies of every pattern were tried in vain, different methods of fishing and working the fly gave no result, though as far as I could see the weather and water conditions were perfect, and I knew the river to be well stocked with fish.

Then it was that, in searching through my fly case, I came across the ' Demon '. I do not know whether it is still called the Demon, but it was a lure about two inches in length, dressed on two hooks, and consisting of a silver body and two black and white cocks' hackles for a wing.

In those days I was considerably more conservative in my ideas of what a ' fly ' should be like, and this was not in the least like anything I

had ever had the pluck to use. But, as I say, although the conditions were perfect, sport of any sort had been singularly aloof, so, with a sense of guilt, and for some reason feeling thoroughly ashamed of what I was doing, I furtively tied the Demon on to my cast.

The change met with immediate and unexpected success, and proved to be the commencement of one of the best afternoon's fishing I have ever had. I killed twelve sea trout and two grilse, and the average was about four pounds—that evening, and far into the night, I was dressing more and more ' Demons '.

It was a club water, and I guarded my secret for quite a long time, or rather I shared it with a great friend ; although it was not always so successful, it accounted for a great many fish. The only part of the river in which I had no success with it was in the estuary and the tidal water—exactly the one place where I had at once made up my mind that it would be most deadly !

I was very fond of fishing the tidal waters because it was a part of the club water little patronized by members of the club. It consisted of long stretches of slack water, with very little stream, and it was often full of sea trout. Although I caught an odd fish on the Demon, I caught only one in every twenty that I rose, and one day, quite by accident, I discovered the solution.

The wind was upstream, the water dead low, and I had been fishing upstream with a ten-foot trout rod and a 3x cast. I had risen a great many fish but caught nothing, and in a fit of desperation I turned round and walked towards the bank, reeling in the line as I went.

I chanced to look round, and what I saw almost frightened me. The Demon was travelling very fast, only just below the surface of the water, and within a foot of it I saw the waves of eight or nine sea trout rushing after it.

Just as the lure was leaving the water a fish took it, so close to me that I could hardly strike ; but the fish was hooked and eventually killed, and the reason of the Demon's failure was made clear.

In the river, where the streams were strong, it had been successful because the wing had swum close to the body ; in the slack water of the estuary it had failed to vindicate itself, because it had lost its character, unless fished fast—and in the estuary it *had* to be fished very fast, especially when there was little or no wind.

It was a tiring form of fishing, because it meant long casting with a single-handed rod, raising the rod point and pulling the line through the rings with the left hand, in order to give the lure sufficient speed.

The time when it was easiest and most attractive to fish was in a strong wind, which blew up

or down the river. Then, if the cast was made straight across the stream at right angles to the bank, and the rod point held well up, the wind did the work, dragging the Demon through the tops of the waves. It was under these conditions that it was most deadly, and often six or seven sea trout would apparently rush at it at the same time.

Those days on the estuary will always live in my memory as some of the happiest and most profitable I have experienced in forty years of fishing, and that is saying much. Apart from the sport, the surroundings were marvellous, the river threading its way through the marshes, bounded on either side by those wonderful Welsh hills, which are always different, always new, and in every changing mood possess some fresh attraction.

In this estuary fishing, the tides had to be studied carefully, because the moment the tide came in and made itself felt, sport was over for that day.

I have never been able to find an explanation for this, since the sea trout seemed to come up on the tide, and one could see them showing and jumping as they arrived. Although it was not difficult to rise them fairly frequently, I do not remember ever having been able to kill one when once the tide had begun to flow, nor indeed until it had completely ebbed. The fish seemed to

come up on the tide, and go back with it in many cases, sometimes leaving a few behind.

In this particular river there appeared to be no reason why the fish should not run at any time in any height of water. There were no falls, no obstructions, and in fact no strong streams; it is difficult to understand just why these sea trout should come up on the tide—presumably with the idea of running the river—and then drop back when the water receded, unless, of course, the call of nature was not sufficiently strong for them to take the fresh water, that they were able to recognize their unpreparedness, and returned for a short time whence they came.

But why should it be so impossible to catch them under these conditions? One would have imagined that this might be the easiest, the most deadly time; that one had only to present something resembling their normal food in the sea to be able to kill as many as one liked. But, however well the fish had been taking before, as soon as the tide made itself felt in the river, the taking period ceased as abruptly as if a definite signal had been given.

In this, as well as in all other fishing, the 'glorious uncertainty' came in, and there were many days when the basket remained completely empty. But I think that, in all these cases, the

emptiness was due to one thing—the fact that on these days the fish were not there. Either they had not come up on the tide before, or, if they had, they had either gone straight through —and there was nothing to prevent them doing this—or else *all* of them had dropped back again to the sea, leaving none of their number behind. If the fish were there, I honestly believe that the Demon, fished as I have described, would take its toll of victims.

The fish in the estuary, or rather the fish one caught in the estuary, were small, varying from three-quarters of a pound to three pounds in weight, with very occasionally a larger one. But they were quite fresh, probably having come up on the last tide, they were caught on a trout rod and a 3x cast, and they rose freely. The best day I had was twenty-six, but there were many afternoons of sixteen or seventeen. To the beginner I would say fish a Demon, fish fine and fish fast—very fast !

Bait Fishing

Bait fishing for sea trout, in that river, resolved itself into one of two things—the Devon minnow or the worm, and the latter I seldom used.

The Devon minnow in big water was so successful that it was unnecessary to search for other means. The sea trout took it well, when the

river was clearing from a flood. It was fished in exactly the same way as if one had been fishing for salmon, with the same rod and reel and tackle; the only real difficulty was to be able to know where to fish, and how deep to fish in the varying heights of water.

It was little use fishing the ordinary lie of the fish, and I wish that I could have back again and employ better the many hours I have spent doing this.

My great friend, then secretary to the club, was the best exponent of this form of fishing I have ever seen—partly because he fished very deep, but mostly, I think, because he had such an intimate knowledge of the river and the habits of the fish.

I have seen him spinning for sea trout, and killing fish after fish, where the water was so heavy and thick that it seemed impossible for the fish to see anything at all. Under these conditions he would be most successful when fishing places which, when the river was in order, would be dry land—the tails of long runs, or some channel between two pools where the fish were running; places where the average fisherman would not dream of fishing.

Then the following day, when the water was considerably lower, but not sufficiently clear to fish a fly, he would fish a completely different set

of places and again be successful. It is a knowledge only gained after years of experience and study of the river and the habits of the fish, and it is impossible to lay down any laws for the guidance of the novice, except a negative law, and that is that the usual lie of the fish will never do at all.

As I say, he fished *very deep*, but only his skill in controlling the bait, and the mental map of the bottom of the river which he carried with him, made this possible.

I have tried the prawn for sea trout, but as far as I know I have never succeeded in doing anything but frighten them. I have never been able to kill a sea trout on a prawn or shrimp, and I do not personally know of any fisherman who has had success with this bait. This is strange to me, because the salmon appears sometimes to display such a marked preference for it ; perhaps the sea trout does not include the shrimp in his diet sheet, even in salt water.

The worm is undoubtedly one of the most deadly baits for sea trout, if fished properly, with the right tackle, in the right places ; but as I seldom fished it—and when I did it was with indifferent success—I can give to the beginner very little useful information on the subject, except to say that here again more depends on the knowledge of the places to fish, in different heights of water, than on the actual fishing itself.

CHAPTER VII

NIGHT FISHING

Touch—The Lie of the Fish—Adverse Conditions—Mist and the Moon—What the Fish Sees—Where to Fish—Selection of a Pool—Flies—The White Wing.

THERE is one other branch of sea trout fishing which possesses a charm all its own. When the river has suffered from a drought for weeks on end, and all day the sun has blazed from a cloudless sky—when, in fact, the fisherman has reluctantly taken to some other form of sport or game, in order to avoid the continuous disappointment and break the sequence of blank days—then is the time to indulge in night fishing for sea trout.

Night fishing lacks many of the qualities which go to make ordinary daytime fishing such a fine sport; but it possesses other weird qualities and attractions.

It is impossible to see accurately where the fly falls, or to have the continuous interest in the control and fishing of the fly after it has touched the water, which the good fisherman must have, and from which he derives so much pleasure.

He cannot see the rise or flash of the rising fish, and cannot time his strike by sight; and having hooked a good sea trout, he cannot see

what is really happening or manœuvre to keep the fish from some sunken snag or rock. He is, comparatively speaking, blind; the sense of sight, possibly the most necessary of the senses to the fisherman, is taken from him, and he must do without it; but as he cannot see, or can only see very little, his concentration and sense of touch become remarkably acute, and if he is to have any success as a night fisherman he must have this added development. He needs it at every turn; he needs it in his casting, and must be able to judge by touch the length of line he is casting; for the tendency in the dark always is to cast too far. He must also know by touch if he has got his cast entangled; but when he requires his sense of touch to be most acute is when the fish takes the fly.

For some reason, the sea trout at night seems to take a fly completely differently—all the fisherman feels is the slightest suspicion, the very ghost of a pluck, and until he realizes this he will miss a great many fish.

I say advisedly that the sea trout *seems* to take the fly differently, but possibly it is not so. In the daytime, fishing with a sunken fly, the sense of sight on which we fishermen rely so much makes the taking of the fly appear to be a more definite act. Possibly, if we were blindfolded in the daytime, and had to rely absolutely on the

sense of touch, the actual moment when the fish took would seem to be equally vague.

Be that as it may, the night fisherman has need of all his powers of concentration, and must keep his brain in his hands. My experience is that the fish—the taking fish, at any rate—drop back into the very tails of the pools, into comparatively shallow water. The water is very slack on the shallows, and the fly necessarily fishes deep, almost on the bottom of the river, and very slow. Therefore the taking fish would be extremely difficult to feel, however well controlled the line might be, when the sense of sight was eliminated.

The slight visible check of the line, a check which hardly reaches the hand, accounts for so very many fish in the daytime when the light is good. The night fisherman is without this, and therefore he needs all his concentration if he is to be successful.

There are two conditions which have always, in my experience, been fatal to success—a ground mist and a moon. The mist seems more or less explainable, because even in the daytime a mist on the river is, generally speaking, disastrous. It is the manifestation of some atmospheric condition which affects the taking tendencies of the fish.

Why these conditions should affect the fish in this way can hardly be ascertained; but most

fishermen will agree that a mist on the river by night or day is not conducive to good sport. It is unfortunately in night fishing of fairly frequent occurrence, especially after a hot August or September day, and has spoilt many an evening which started and promised well.

However good the sport before that mist rises, it seems to stop completely on its arrival, and although I have persevered after the mist has come, it has invariably been a fruitless perseverance.

Why moonlight should be so detrimental I have no idea whatsoever, and can only say that I have found it so. Never that I can remember have I experienced a good night's fishing when the moon has been up. I cannot, in fact, recall a moonlight night which has given any sport at all.

It is possible that the moonlight casts some fatal and revealing shadow which discovers the fisherman to the fish; it is possible that the fly and gut cast are more apparently a fake to the fish than is the case even in daylight. It is possible —but, after all, why struggle with this question of what the fish does or does not see, because surely we can never know? What the lens of the fish's eye conveys to the fish's brain must always be one of those impenetrable mysteries, dark and insoluble, which make fishing to the fisherman so supreme among the sports.

We can go on conjecturing, theorizing, and

occasionally learning a little ; but inevitably, in every line of thought we pursue, we arrive at this eternal wall beyond which we are powerless to travel : What does the fish see, and what does it convey to him ? No one can tell, and I for one say ' Thank goodness it is so ! ' Thank goodness that fishing, the science and practice of fishing, has advanced hardly at all since the days of Izaak Walton, for this very reason. Was not it Rudyard Kipling's hero in *Captains Courageous* who caught more cod than anyone else because he thought like a cod. If we could, we fishermen, all think and see like a trout, salmon, or sea trout, that would be the beginning of the end of fishing—the death-knell of what is to us all the greatest, the most alluring, and the most subtle of all the sports.

There is always this difficulty of where to fish, but in night fishing it is perhaps not quite so difficult. One reason for this is that, as a rule, the night fisherman does not pursue his art until the river is dead low. In the Welsh river which I fished for many years it was possible, in low water, when the sun was shining, to see nearly every fish in the river. The choice of a pool for night operations was therefore governed partly by this knowledge of which pool was best stocked with fish, and partly by the character of the pool itself.

In night fishing one does not wish to encounter more casting difficulties than are absolutely necessary. All such difficulties should be avoided. Trees close behind the fisherman, or a high clay bank topped by gorse bushes, are sufficiently unpleasant in broad daylight; but on a dark night they are a tragedy.

A pool with the stream on the far side, and a deep back-water in front of the fisherman's feet, never an easy place to fish, becomes at night a maze in which the fly is sunk and lost and completely out of touch.

The ideal place is a long, smooth glide, with an even flow of water from bank to bank, and not too deep. The tail of this glide is probably the most likely, and when the fisherman has arrived at the end of the fishing water, or rather what would be the end of it in the daytime, let him continue for another twenty yards or more, because that in all probability is the most likely place of all.

The lie of the taking fish is almost invariably either higher up in the stream, or lower down on the tail, than the normal lies on the daytime. The fish appear to take up positions in the shallower water. A dark background is a great help, but it is not so all-important as is the case in day fishing. Another factor which should be taken into consideration in the selection of a pool

is, that if wading is necessary, it should be easy wading, and there should be some place which makes the netting of the fish—an operation fraught with considerable difficulties—as easy as possible.

Having selected his pool for night operations with a good deal of care, I would advise the fisherman not to make the mistake of starting too soon. He should not commence operations, in fact, until it is *quite dark* ; then, if it is necessary to wade, he should take great care to disturb the water as little as possible. I think this is of great importance. What fly he fishes with, and of what size, must depend on himself, for no rule can possibly be laid down.

Most fishermen will probably prefer a white-winged fly, somewhat similar to a large Coachman ; but I have always doubted the soundness of this selection. Certainly it is more obvious to the fisherman, but is it to the fish ? I have tried white-winged flies and black-winged flies, hackled flies and small salmon flies, but have had no outstanding success with any particular pattern or size or colour. Practice and experiment have taught me nothing, or next to nothing, and left me guessing.

As far as the actual fishing of the fly is concerned, this must vary according to the character of the pool ; but I have always found that the

slower and deeper the fly was fished, the better sport I had. Very little movement should be imparted to the fly. The fisherman should remember that the tendency, in night fishing, is always to over-cast—to cast too far—because at night the far bank seems to be so much farther away than it really is.

After having hooked a good fish, the playing of him is full of surprises, because the fisherman is literally in the dark as to the position of the fish. It is extremely difficult to know how far away the fish is, exactly what direction he is taking, and altogether the whole performance is full of thrills. A most necessary part of the night fisherman's equipment is an electric torch.

Although night fishing has its thrills, although those hours of an August night by the river have a cool, weird beauty all their own, night fishing to me could never compare with day fishing, and I personally would only resort to it when the day conditions have been continuously hopeless.

Then, after a long, hot day, the coolness, the peace, the sound of the running water, the calls of the birds and all the stealthy noises of a river by night, give to the fisherman a sense of isolation from his kind, a feeling that he is part of nature —part of the river, part of the landscape, part of the night—a feeling that, for the time, takes

away many of his worries, and seems to put those that remain into their proper perspective.

That is much, so why worry if the night is blank, or if the best fish we hooked attached itself to a tree root under the far bank, and there remained!

CHAPTER VIII

LAKE FISHING

More Inconsistent than the River—Good or Bad Days—Tackle and Flies—Movement—Where to Fish—Strength of the Wind—The Mouth of the Stream—Dry Fly in a Calm—Our Allies the Swallows—Good Conditions ?

FISHING is a disease, and has at least one factor in common with other fell diseases : providentially, in after years, the patient fails to remember accurately (or even to remember at all) the bad times or bad days.

I have fished lakes and reservoirs for many years and in many places, and the only days I can remember are the really good days, and those I think could be counted on the fingers of one hand.

I know that there were days when not the faintest breeze rippled the surface of the lake, when it was blisteringly hot and oppressive, and when you could see twenty yards away a 3x or 4x cast, glittering like a silver rope—days in which a thick mist came down and lay like a pall on the water, damping everything, including the ardour of the fisherman ; days of north-easterly gales, accompanied by heavy rain and sleet, when one sat lugubrious but hopeful in a wet boat, while streams of water poured down one's spine, and

one's hands were frozen stiff to the grip of the rod, wondering which ancestor was responsible for the undoubted lunacy in the family; and days when everything seemed perfect, though nothing happened at all.

I know these days did exist, but I have only a vague, indefinite memory of them. For some reason, lake fishing seems to be more inconstant than river fishing, and it is difficult to say exactly why this should be the case.

There are, of course, differences between the two waters that may account for it to a certain extent.

For instance, as a whole, the average lake is deeper than the river over most of its area, and unless there is a definite hatch of fly it is difficult to induce the trout to come to the surface at all, or to make his way on to the shallower feeding-grounds where he can see the artificial fly. He seems to remain at the bottom and take no interest in anything the fisherman can do for him.

In a river the case is never quite so bad. If the fisherman is unable to do any good in the deep pools he can often be successful in the shallow runs, where perhaps the trout has taken up a feeding position in order to wait for any form of food which may come his way—and in the river the food comes to him more than in

the lake, where, in the absence of a breeze, he has to go and look for it.

Then, again, there is a question of a breeze or a calm. The calm, in conjunction with a cloudless sky, a bright sun, renders the chances of any real success on a lake very remote indeed, because (to quote only one reason) the fish sees too much when the water is calm, while the sunshine glints on the gut cast and discloses the artificiality of the fly.

This can be overcome to a certain extent on the river by fishing runs and rough water where the ripples and broken surface of the stream must prevent the fish seeing the tackle, and the fly, with that accuracy which breeds suspicion. The water in a river must be much more aerated, by being constantly broken up by rough streams and miniature waterfalls, and this is not so in a lake.

Whether this fact has any definite effect on the feeding propensities of the fish—as Mr. Earl Hodgson suggests in his delightful book *Trout Fishing*—I do not know; but it may well be so, and if it is a fact it furnishes yet another reason why the river is more consistent than the lake.

As a general rule, my experience has been that there are only two kinds of days in lake fishing —the very good and the very bad; and that the moderately successful day is of much more

frequent occurrence on the river. Lake fishing has to me quite a different sort of appeal.

The very size and depth of a lake, situated as it frequently is on the moors or the edge of a moorland, gives the fisherman a sense of aloofness, of being alone with the wild things, with the curlew, the redshank, the grouse and the drumming snipe for his companions. There is also a feeling that the water may contain the most immense of fishes, because of its size and depth. It probably does not contain anything over a pound, but the possibility is ever present and leads the fisherman on to continued and sustained effort.

To many lake fishing may be the most appealing branch of the sport, but to myself it can never compare with the river. I love it as a variation, and enjoy an occasional day or days in those lovely surroundings as much as anyone can enjoy such things, though it can never give me the same pleasure as the running water. There is never, to me, that infinite variety which the running water provides. The casting and control of the line after the cast is much the same throughout the day, and that makes for monotony.

Few of us, I think, would take a lake to fish for three months of the year, and pay a large rent for it; but many, who could only just afford to do so, would hire a good beat on a river, and that really is the test.

Few fishermen of my acquaintance have given to lake fishing and its problems the study and thought which have been given to the fishing of rivers in this country, and it sometimes seems to me that the whole offensive with the majority of fishermen suffers from this lack of study and is still somewhat primitive.

To take, for example, the question of tackle and the flies most suited to a lake. Very often the fisherman who would fish a river with the finest of casts and small flies—the pattern of which he has thought out with much care in order to represent as nearly as possible the insects which were most likely to hatch out at that time of year—will proceed to fish the lake which is actually fed by that river with a completely different set of flies, which, as far as he knows, represent nothing at all! Also he will use much heavier tackle, although the fish he is likely to catch are no larger than those the river holds. I have never been able to extract from those fishermen any sound reason why this should be a common practice.

What do the 'Butcher', the 'Zulu', the teal and red, and all those other large lake flies represent?

On some Scotch lochs, or on any lake surrounded by moors and heather, there are undoubtedly large and sometimes brilliantly coloured flies

which hatch out in quantities, and undoubtedly form a food-supply for the fish; the accepted lake flies may, in some cases, represent these insects more or less faithfully.

In my opinion, the usual pattern of lake fly, as the present day fisherman and tackle-maker knows it, must have been invented for use on those Scotch lochs, where they are not only useful but probably more killing than the ordinary river trout fly, but this is not always so. These flies have been given the name of 'lake flies', and are fished universally on every lake, reservoir, or tarn, whatever its altitude or surroundings, just because it is a lake, and this seems to me to be a very doubtful policy.

The kinds of flies to be used on a lake must surely depend to some extent on that lake's altitude and surroundings; and to put the matter broadly I would say that, when fishing any lake below an altitude of a thousand feet above sea-level, the ordinary river trout flies that are most successful on the local streams will prove more effective than the accepted lake patterns.

These lake patterns seem to me to be largely a matter of tradition; fishermen take a great deal too much for granted, and many of us do not think enough for ourselves.

Now, for this question of fishing less fine in a lake than in a river. Surely, unless the average

size of the trout in the lake is greater than of those in the river, the reverse should be the case, and it should be possible to fish even finer in the lake. The fish has no stream to help him, and probably no rocks to speak of, and unless the lake contains a great deal of weed, the fisherman has a large expanse of still water, comparatively free from trouble, in which to deal with any trout he hooks. Apart from that, the lake is still water and requires if anything more delicate treatment.

Now we come to a very important question, one on which much of the fisherman's chance of success must depend. When fishing a wet fly on a lake, what is the fisherman trying to represent and how shall he represent it ? It must surely be one of three things—a nymph, a drowned or spent fly, or some form of subaqueous insect or fresh water shrimp.

If it is a drowned or spent fly, it must be a very difficult proposition, because the natural insect in the still water of the lake would be completely motionless. If this is the case, the imitation should also be motionless, and it is almost an impossibility to keep in touch with a motionless wet fly in still water, unless the trout takes the fly the moment it alights.

If, however, it is the nymph or something alive under the water which the fisherman is attempting to imitate, then life or movement of some sort

should be imparted to the fly. It therefore behoves the lake fisher, when tying on his fly, to make up his mind what that fly is intended to represent, and having made up his mind, to fish it accordingly. It is sufficiently obvious that the motionless nymph is unnatural, and also that movement applied to an insect which is supposed to be dead is equally false.

The amount of movement to be imparted to the fly is a question which must be decided by each individual fisherman. Personally, my object when fishing a lake is to keep in touch with my fly, so that if, as is often the case, the fish does not break the water, I still have a good chance of hooking him. In my opinion this imparts quite enough life to the fly.

The question of where to fish on a lake must depend greatly on local knowledge, on the source of the food-supply, and on the direction and strength of the wind ; so if it is to be answered at all, it can only be in a very general way, and must necessarily be faulty on certain days.

Generally speaking, then, the fish do not rise freely in very deep water, but come on to the shallows in search of food ; no doubt one reason for this is that a great deal of the food is blown on to the water from the banks.

I said just now that where to fish must depend on the direction and strength of the wind.

There is a case in which I think the strength of the wind is of great importance.

Supposing the fisherman has chosen a narrow arm of the lake, having on the windward side a high bank, supposing that the food-supply is being blown off that high bank on to the surface of the water, I suggest that—although it is more difficult and far from pleasant—the fisherman has more chance of success if he casts from the opposite bank *into* the wind. I am speaking of lakes where there are no boats, or where boat fishing is not permitted.

My reason for this suggestion is that the fish will most likely be nearer that bank, because of the strength of the breeze having carried the fly three-quarters of the way across the narrow bay, and it will then cause it to drift quickly into the shore. Even if the food-supply comes from a water insect hatching on the bottom of the lake, the flies, when they arrive on the surface, will be drifted quickly by the force of the wind towards the shore.

There is also another reason which may be worth consideration : if the fisherman is able to cast his fly into the wind, the movement of the nymph is supplied by the wind itself, and *is in the right direction.*

One more suggestion to the beginner on the subject of where to fish—it is obvious, but it has

saved me many a blank day, when such blank day seemed inevitable. Let him search for some river, stream, or inlet, and fish the mouth of it —even on the worst days it may be good for half a dozen large fish.

There may be a hatch of fly on some shingle-bed just above the mouth of that stream, and if so, dozens of good trout may have collected there to do justice to the meal, even if the rest of the lake is apparently without any outward signs of life. What a triumph it is if, after having lashed the lake into foam hour after fruitless hour, the weary fisherman has had to walk a long way in search of his little river, and his dream of rising trout of immense proportions, to find that his dream has materialized.

Such a day, such an experience, will always live in his memory as a triumph, and not go down into oblivion as the failure it so nearly was. That is all I can say about 'where to fish' on lakes, but before I conclude this chapter just a few words about the use of the dry fly in a calm, and here is another method which may save the fisherman a blank day.

There are frequently days when the steady breeze, beloved by those who fish still waters, dies suddenly and is replaced by a flat, oily calm; when the drifting clouds have completely dispersed, leaving the sun to do its worst (as far as

the fisherman is concerned); yet sometimes on those days there may be found two or three really good fish feeding on the surface. Then is the moment for the fisherman to grease his line and make all prepared for the floating fly; but do not let him rush in, so to speak, before he is quite certain what he wants to do.

There are two difficulties connected with dry fly fishing on a lake. One is that the fly remains stationary exactly when you cast it, and the other is that ninety per cent of the fish taking floating flies on a lake are cruisers.

These cruisers, as a rule, have a definite beat, which they only seem to vary at the moment when the fisherman succeeds in placing his fly directly in their track. The fisherman would be well advised, before starting operations, to study carefully the beat of the fish for which he has decided to try. Then, when he has taken up his position and got out the correct length of line, he should shoot a yard or two ahead of the rising fish—and hope!

The beat of the fish may vary, and he may travel wide of the fly and never see it; it is possible that the fisherman's dry fly is of the wrong size and pattern, and the trout may pass it by, taking another just beyond it—in which case the only counter-move on the part of the fisherman is to change his fly to something nearer

the insect on the water, wait for the fish to come round again, and then repeat the performance.

It is a fascinating business, but it takes time. Every fish, however, caught in this way has been earned by the fisherman, and is a fish which most probably would have been utterly inaccessible with a wet fly.

Often it is difficult to find these rising fish in a lake, but sometimes, if it is in the summer, the swallows may help the defeated fisherman. If he sees in the distance these allies of his flying low over the surface of the lake at a certain point, and picking flies off the water, it is always worth his while to go and investigate. The chances are that he will find the trout feeding as well as the birds.

Now for one more question, which the hopeful fisherman is perpetually asking: 'Do you think this would be a good day to go to So-and-So,' mentioning some lake or reservoir, perhaps fifteen or twenty miles distant, and at an altitude of perhaps five or six hundred feet higher.

This is a very difficult question to answer. It would be sufficiently difficult if it referred to a river, but the increased inconsistency of a lake renders it even more puzzling, and I confess to knowing little or nothing of the subject, because so often I have been proved wrong. There is, however, one time when I would risk prophesying a certain amount of sport.

After a longish drought, when there has been a day's rain or even heavy showers, which have aerated and freshened the water with the additional help of a steady breeze, not too strong, I think that the fisherman may be excused his optimism, and feel himself rather badly treated if some measure of success is not forthcoming, and his basket is empty at the end of the day.

CHAPTER IX

TWO WARTIME EXPERIENCES

I

IT was during the latter part of July of 1918 that I found myself with a company of tanks in what, at first, appeared to be a peaceful little village, two miles behind the lines in the Somme area.

Below me, a quarter of a mile distant through almost tropical undergrowth, flowed the Ancre—at this point one of the most perfect looking dry fly streams it has ever been my lot to see.

It was a wonderful summer's evening, with a cool, gentle breeze, and apart from a distant dull, heavy rumbling sound, and the occasional spluttering of a machine-gun or the distant isolated crack of a rifle, where some hopeful sniper thought he had seen a target, the Great War seemed very far away.

Slowly I walked down to the river, and there sat and dreamed of rivers and fish, and all the happiness and peace and beauty that rivers and fish had brought to me in the old days. The Ancre looked like a dry fly fisherman's paradise, and I had heard that, before the war, it had been full of good trout. I also knew, alas! that the troops in these parts had caught a great many

fish with Mills' bombs, and other tackle of a similar nature, none of which was at all likely to improve sport from the dry fly purist's point of view.

Although I had in my kit a small four-piece rod, a reel, and half a dozen dry flies, I had just about come to the conclusion that it would be waste of time to fish, when I heard a tiny 'plop'. Looking round, I saw at the exact spot where one would have expected to see it, the widening rings of a rise. That did it! I hurried back to my billet, and, collecting my meagre tackle, almost ran back to the river, and as I ran I seemed again to see that rise—it was getting dusk, however, and I could not be quite certain.

With all possible speed I 'put up' the rod, attaching a blue-winged olive or something that looked very like it, and proceeded at once to stalk my fish.

The stalk was fraught with considerable difficulties, chiefly owing to the fact that much of the bank was very wet and marshy, and that it was pitted with great shell-holes, all of which were full of water.

However, after considerable trouble, I arrived at the point from which I was going to make my cast. It was a somewhat precarious position, and necessitated my kneeling on the ridge separating two waterlogged shell-holes, but it was the best

I could do. It seemed so odd to be there, in those surroundings, with the peaceful implements of the fisherman, but adorned with a tin hat and a small box respirator. As I lengthened my line I laughed to myself.

Just as I had got out enough line, and was in the act of making the final cast, there was a blinding flame and a terrible rib-crushing, deafening explosion. I pitched helplessly forward into the deep water of a shell-hole! My gas mask became entangled round my neck and nearly choked me, and so quick was my fall that my tin hat seemed to remain for quite an appreciable time suspended in the air, only to descend on the back of my head with a sickening thud and push my face farther into the foul, stagnant water of the shell-hole!

For a few moments I was quite certain that I was dead, and then, just as suddenly, I realized that I was completely unhurt! As I clawed my slimy way out of the shell-hole, readjusted my painfully heavy tin hat, disposed my wet gas mask in a less inconvenient position, and picked up my discarded rod, I thought I heard from behind me the sounds of subdued merriment. Looking in the direction from which those sounds proceeded I understood what had happened.

In some thick undergrowth, about fifteen yards

directly behind the spot where I had been kneeling to make my final cast, perfectly camouflaged, lurked one of our own nine-inch howitzers. I was unable to see the gun-team, but I have no doubt that they could see me! So, summoning what dignity I could—which did not amount to much—I retired dripping up the hill to my billet, and a few minutes later, very wet and very muddy, somewhat bruised, but with my sense of humour partially restored to me, I crept into the little house, desperately hoping that none of my officers or men had witnessed my downfall or my ignominious return.

That was the first and last time I ever fished the Ancre!

We left the district a few days later, and never returned, and I shall never know whether that one round, fired at the psychological moment, was intended to inconvenience the enemy or only myself. I shall never be quite certain that even the rise which I saw, or what I imagined to be a rise, was not organized by the humorist who discharged the gun, and I shall never know whether, in the year of grace 1918, there were any trout in the Ancre at all.

All I do know is that if, as I am inclined to think, the whole incident was part of a spontaneous joke, it was a most complete success, and has caused a great deal of amusement, not only

THE FINAL CAST

to the perpetrators of the joke, but also to the victim, and more especially to his friends.

II

To the fisherman—at any rate to the fisherman who has been more or less a slave to the sport from infancy—there is no other pastime quite so absorbing, and none calculated to efface so completely, if only for a time, unpleasant memories, or to give rest to a brain laden with overmuch responsibility.

It was June 5, 1918, and for the previous two months or more, such experiences and responsibilities had not been wanting. We had become involved, reluctantly and most unexpectedly, in the March retreat. We had suffered heavily as machine-gunners, when Kemmel Hill was taken by the Germans, and this had been followed by some weeks' sojourn in that hell of mud and depression the Ypres salient.

But now, in the lovely, peaceful little village of Humières, not far from Hesdin, we were hard at work refitting, reorganizing, and taking over our real arm, the tank. The fifth of June was a half-holiday, so as soon as work was over at midday I collected my rod and what little tackle I possessed, and set out for the river at a point a few miles east of Hesdin.

I had heard of immense trout only waiting to

be caught by the tolerably expert fisher, where the staff of a certain school spent their leisure evenings in conflict with three- and four-pounders —so to the school I went. I cannot remember what particular branch of soldiering the school taught—whether it was the art of destroying people or making them well again, whether it was gunnery, economy, or medicine—but I do know that they were extremely kind to me. They gave me lunch, and then one of their number took me down to the river, and showed me a stretch of water which, in appearance, could not be beaten even by the Test at Stockbridge.

My guide and myself crossed the main road, and making our way through a thick wood, came upon the river, spanned at this point by a wooden bridge. Looking downstream from the bridge lay a long canal-like stretch of water, not too deep, and with an even flow of stream from bank to bank. On the side from which we approached the thick wood and undergrowth extended right up to the water's edge, and made any fishing from that side impossible. On the far side a path followed down the bank, lined by large trees at frequent intervals, spaced like the trees in an avenue. Both banks were about five feet in height and steep, and no wading was possible.

At the bridge my guide left me. Crossing the river, I walked down the path, and taking up a

comfortable and strategic position with my back to one of the big trees, I watched that lovely stretch of water and awaited results. I had not long to wait!

On the far side of the stream, exactly opposite where I sat, was an overhanging branch of a tree. Under that branch, and eighteen inches from the bank, a great stake, apparently driven into the bed of the stream, protruded a foot above the surface of the water; between this stake and the far bank a large trout was rising. So close to the bank was the rise that, at first, I thought it must be a water rat, but when the fish continued feeding, there was no doubt not only that it was a fish, but that it was a very good fish.

Then came the question of how to approach it. Much the best way, had it been humanly possible, would have been to re-cross the bridge, right my way through the wood, and tackle the situation with a comparatively short line from that side. But the impenetrable nature of the undergrowth, and the overhanging branches, rendered this completely out of the question.

I had no waders, and in any case it was too deep to wade, so the only thing that remained was to do the best I could from my own bank. It was a longish cast and a left-handed cast, and there was a slight downstream wind. The avenue of

trees close behind me added still further to the difficulty, but it had to be tried, and so I tried it.

I tried and tried. It was necessary to get the last yard of the cast and to curl round the stake under the low, overhanging branch, and that little downstream breeze spoilt it every time.

At last I managed to get it right, or nearly right ; the fish rose and I struck, For a moment, I thought all was well ; but no, I had hooked the stake ! While despondently trying to get the fly clear again, I put the fish down.

Sitting down again with my back to the tree, I watched for perhaps a quarter of an hour, but there was no activity between the stake and the far bank. So picking up my rod, I pursued my sad way downstream in search of another victim. I was away for half an hour, or perhaps more, without finding any other good fish ; but to my great joy, on returning, I found my friend up again and rising steadily.

The whole offensive was started afresh. There were the same difficulties and the same disappointments when the breeze just turned that last foot back and rendered the cast useless. One of the avenue trees behind me was exactly in the wrong place, and then, just as I was about to give up the unequal struggle, the thing happened. A reverse gust of wind took the fly, and curling

round the stake, laid it as gently as a feather a foot above the fish.

There was no conceivable doubt about it this time! I struck, and keeping as heavy a strain as I dared from the moment of the strike, I dragged the fish from behind the stake before he realized what had happened, and then the fun began.

Time and time again he fought to get back to his stronghold, but each time he just failed. Then at last came the time when, lying on his side, it was only a matter of getting him up the steep bank under my feet.

I had a rod, a reel, two casts, and perhaps half a dozen flies, but my fishing equipment in France did not run to a landing-net, and my friend was between two and three pounds in weight.

The only substitute for a net of which I could think in my excitement was my cap—not a tin hat this time! Removing it from my head, and lying face down on the bank, I managed to get it under the fish. It was soft and it buckled, and, anyway, when I lifted it, the water flowed out of it—and the fish with the water! Twice I tried, and at the second effort, I raised him a foot out of the water; in doing so, the line became slack again and he slid from the cap into the water, and this time without the fly.

For perhaps fifteen seconds he lay where he fell, and then wearily and slowly swam back towards his home. It was terrible! The world had come to an end, and nothing mattered; the Great War was completely forgotten! It was getting late, and I had not the heart to fish any more.

Sitting with my back to the tree again, I lit a cigarette, surveyed the hollowness of the universe, and nearly wept.

Then, taking up my rod, I crossed the bridge and pursued my defeated way through that dark, sad wood to the mess of the school, where, thanks to the hospitality of my hosts, alcohol awaited me.

Sitting there in the mess over a whisky and soda, or maybe two, I told my story, and looking at my dejected appearance and sodden cap my hosts believed me.

They knew him, knew him intimately, and his name I think was 'Clarence'. They told me that until that day no one had actually hooked Clarence, but that whenever they could get away in the evenings they were wont to go and commune with him.

It was after hearing him discussed with so much affection that I began to see things from a right angle. How near I had come to committing a murder! What a terrible tragedy it

THE ESCAPE OF CLARENCE

would have been if I had possessed a landing-net at the end of that struggle! What an irreparable loss it would have been if Clarence had never again risen steadily between the stake and the far bank!

After all, as far as I was concerned, Clarence had furnished me with the maximum amount of sport during that afternoon, and, looking back on the incident, I cannot be too glad that it ended as it did, and that possibly Clarence gained experience and cunning from the encounter, which may have enabled him to defy all future attacks, and that a few months later, when the war came to an end, the school staff and Clarence went their respective ways with feelings of mutual regret at parting!

It is more than ten years ago that we met and parted, Clarence and I, and the strange thing to me is that the whole episode on the river seems as clear as if it had happened yesterday. But alas! I cannot recall anything else; the names of my kindly hosts have entirely escaped me, nor can I remember how I got there from Humières. A diary which I kept at the time tells me that something went wrong with the transport for my homeward journey, that I had to walk most of the way back—about ten kilometres—and that I was very tired; but even that I have forgotten, and only the memory of the actual encounter,

and the exact appearance of the battle-field, remain.

Clarence, by now, must have gone the way of all good trout, but I sincerely hope that his declining years were prosperous and his end peaceful.

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FISHING WAYS AND WILES

Major H. E. Morritt

With an Introduction by
LORD HOWARD DE WALDEN